

STATE BUSHFIRE COORDINATION COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Meeting 6/2

19 March 2021

'The Think Tank', Level 1, Ibis Hotel, 122 Grenfell St, Adelaide

09:08 – 10:29hrs

Attendance

Mr Mark Jones, QFSM	Chairman (<i>ex officio</i>)
Ms Anthea Howard	Executive Officer
Ms Kylie Egan	Member, Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)
Mr Graeme Brown	Member, Dept. for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT)
Ms Justine Drew	Member, Dept. of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA)
Ms Monique Blason	Member, ForestrySA (FSA)
Mr Peter White	Member, Primary Producers SA (PPSA)
Mr Brett Loughlin	Member, SA Country Fire Service (SACFS)
Mr Peter Button	Member, SA Metropolitan Fire Service (SAMFS)
Ms Ali Walsh	Member, SA Power Networks (SAPN)
Mr James Crocker	Member, SA Water (SAW)
Ms Denise LeBlond	Deputy Member, Attorney-General's Department (Planning and Land Use Services) (AGD-PLUS)
Mr Andrew Cadd	Member, Country Fire Service Volunteers Association (CFSVA)
Mr Mark Ashley	Member, Conservation Council South Australia (CCSA)
Mr John Moyle	Member, Local Government Australia (South Australia) (LGASA)
Mr Mark Sutton	Deputy Member, Outback Communities Authority (OCA)
Ms Fiona Gill	Member, Dept. for Environment and Water (DEW)
Mrs Emily Jenke (by phone)	Member, Native Vegetation Council (NVC)

Apologies

Ms Anita Allen	AGD-PLUS
Mr Bill McIntosh	OCA
AC Noel Bamford	SAPOL
A/AC John Venditto	SAPOL

Observers and Guests

A/AC John De Candia	Observer, SAPOL
Mr Frank Crisci	Observer, SAPN
Ms Sonia Post	Observer, SACFS
Mr Andrew Patten	Observer, SACFS
Ms Paula Slutzkin	Administrative Support, SACFS

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed attendees and formally opened the meeting at 09:08hrs, followed by an Acknowledgement of Country.

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2. Apologies

The Chairman noted apologies received, and observers present in the room. He noted that Ms Fiona Gill (DEW) would be arriving late to the meeting. It was also noted that Ms Emily Jenke (NVC) was attending the meeting via teleconference.

3. Safety Briefing

The Executive Officer outlined the evacuation procedures for the building and the location of exit and meeting points.

4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest/Probity

The Chairman asked for a declaration of any Conflicts of Interest or Probity matters foreseen at the outset of the meeting to be declared now, or to be declared as they arise throughout the meeting.

Mr John Moyle (LGASA) noted a potential conflict of interest in regard to business item 8.3.1 – Bushfire Management Committee (BMC) Membership, as a nominee is an employee of the City of Tea Tree Gully, of which Mr Moyle is the Chief Executive Officer.

Ms Monique Blason (FSA) also noted a potential conflict of interest in regard to business item 8.3.1, in that the nominees are employees at ForestrySA.

The Chairman expressed confidence that these connections would not cause any conflict of interest, but thanked the Members for sharing them.

At 09:13hrs Mr James Crocker (SA Water) joined the meeting.

5. Confirmation of Minutes of Previous Meeting

The draft minutes of the State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBCC) meeting of 11 December 2020 were considered for confirmation. No corrections were tabled.

The Committee resolved as follows:

That the draft minutes of the previous SBCC meeting held on Friday 11 December 2020 be taken as read and confirmed as a true and accurate record.

Moved: Mr Graeme Brown

Seconded: Mr Peter Button

Carried.

6. Business Arising from the Minutes

6.1. Update on Amendments to the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)*

The SBCC noted the briefing provided regarding the status of amendments to the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)* and *Regulations*. No questions were raised.

Noted.

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7. Australian Fire Danger Rating System Update

The SBCC noted the update provided on the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS). No questions were raised.

Noted.

8. Governance Working Group

The Chairman noted the briefing provided including a recommendation regarding the formation of the proposed Governance Working Group.

The Committee resolved as follows:

That the State Bushfire Coordination Committee notes that the formation of the proposed Governance Working Group is on hold pending passage and proclamation of the Fire and Emergency Services (Governance) Amendment Bill and the completion of the State Bushfire Management Plan. The proposed management of the review of governance arrangements for the SBCC and BMCs will be recommitted for the Committee's consideration once the Bill has been enacted and the Plan finalised.

Moved: Mr Peter Button

Seconded: Ms Monique Blason

Carried.

9. Property Preparedness Working Group / Development of Code of Practice for Private Land Fuel Management

The Chairman noted the briefing regarding the Property Preparedness Working Group and the Development of Code of Practice for Private Land Fuel Management (Code of Practice). He commented that while this was the second business item proposed to be held over until the completion of the State Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP), it is important that the SBCC get the SBMP right first, and then generate meaningful work from it.

In response to a question from Ms Denise LeBlond (AGD-PLUS) regarding when SBCC Members will have the opportunity to review a draft of the Code of Practice, the Executive Officer noted that once the SBMP is signed off, the SBCC will need to consider the works plan arising from it. It is anticipated that a draft works plan will be presented at the next meeting of the SBCC in May 2021 for review. In the context of the works plan, there are some components of the Code of Practice that may be progressed sooner, and some elements that will be dependent on resolution of bigger-picture policy matters.

The Chairman noted the importance of considering delivery of and actions that will come out of the SBMP while finalising it.

In response to a question from Ms Ali Walsh (SAPN), the Executive Officer noted that progression of the Code of Practice is on hold until the SBMP works plan is developed, and this necessarily takes into consideration resourcing and feasibility of delivery timeframes.

The Committee resolved as follows:

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That the State Bushfire Coordination Committee notes that the scope and timing of the development of a Code of Practice for Private Land Fuel Management will be reviewed in the context of the first annual works plan for the SBCC arising from the completed State Bushfire Management Plan. The proposed Private Property Working Group will be recommitted for the Committee's consideration once the Plan is completed and the annual works plan has been finalised.

Moved: Mr Peter White

Seconded: Mr Graeme Brown

Carried.

10. Correspondence

The correspondence received by the SBCC as circulated in the meeting papers was noted by the SBCC without discussion.

Noted.

11. Business items

11.1. State Bushfire Management Plan – Draft for Public Consultation

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input, and the level of commitment shown to developing the draft Plan, which he noted had improved a great deal since the initial draft, due to everyone's input.

The Executive Officer tabled the summary version of the SBMP, and explained that the text of the summary mirrors that of the complete SBMP. It is a cut-down version capturing the purpose and scope of the plan, together with the vision and the mission, followed by the objectives and actions for both the SBCC and the coordination actions. She noted that the purpose of this document is to provide the opportunity for the public to review a shortened version of the SBMP during the public consultation period.

The Executive Officer also noted work with YourSAy to prepare the online communications strategy. Both the summary version and the full version of the SBMP will be posted on Monday 22 March 2021. The version to be released for public consultation will be the most recent version circulated to the SBCC, with a few minor amendments:

- Changes to expression (no substantive changes);
- Minor copy edits, such as fixing spelling errors and repeated sentences; and
- Changes that the Minister's office sent through to the wording of the foreword.

A brief survey regarding the Plan has also been created. The Executive Officer noted that the SBMP is focused on systems and governance, and policy and procedure, and as such the subject matter is very dense. Considering this, in consultation with YourSAy it was determined that the best approach to seeking public input was to ask the community about the desired outcomes from the Plan in a broad sense, including what would help members of the community and business sector manage their risk from bushfire, rather than asking for specific comment on the content of the document.

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The primary audience for this document is the member agencies of the SBCC and wider agencies and organisations who have regulatory responsibilities for bushfire management.

The Executive Officer also reiterated the Chairman's thanks to all SBCC Members and Deputies and agencies for their significant engagement and contribution to the draft Plan, especially considering the compressed timeframe.

The Executive Officer noted that comment will be sought from a range of additional organisations, and SBCC Members were invited to propose specific organisations they would like to see invited to provide comment.

09:28 Ms Fiona Gill (DEW) joined the meeting.

Mr Mark Ashley (CCSA) asked whether there was any flexibility to extend the length of the public consultation period, as there is a need for the CCSA to consult with over 65 organisations. The Executive Officer noted that while there is no timeframe flexibility, the SACFS can work with the CCSA and any other Member organisations requiring support to assist with targeted consultation.

Mr Andrew Cadd (CFSVA) suggested a small wording change on page 30, being: rather than "the impact of bushfires can be reduced by minimising the chance of them occurring", he suggests "the impact of bushfires can be reduced by the actions of prevention and preparedness" or similar words.

Ms Monique Blason (FSA) asked whether minor proposed amendments should be tabled, or sent directly through to the Executive Officer. The Chairman responded that with minor amendments, rather than tabling them at the meeting, it would be most appropriate to email these through to the Executive Officer, and copy in other committee members in case they have views on the proposed amendments.

Ms Blason also raised noted that the cost/losses listed in Figure 12 on page 18 of the Plan - *Selected Significant Bushfires across South Australia 1955-2021* - were rudimentary in terms of capturing the actual losses. She noted that the extent of the impacts of some of these events were wider than captured by the figures in the table. For example, entire industries being profoundly affected, such as the wine industry being affected by smoke taint, and/or loss of vineyards or crops.

Ms Ali Walsh (SAPN) pointed out that the losses from the Ngarkat fires are not captured, noting that fires in Ngarkat and Billiatt protected areas together burnt the entirety of these reserves, and threatened the existence of numerous native species.

The Chairman noted that the fire service measures have not historically encompassed downstream or psychological or ecological impacts of these events. He also noted that the older incidents included in the table occurred at a time when the full extent of losses were often not known. This may suggest that inclusion of the costs/losses in the figure has limited value.

The Executive Officer suggested that this Figure in the Plan is reflective of the currently available information, and was derived from a diverse range of sources. The collation of data about broader impacts of bushfires and of existential risk as proposed in the Plan is an important action, and would assist in addressing existing information gaps. She suggested

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that while the public consultation period is open, if agencies have access to relevant incident data, it can be included in the final document where appropriate (noting the graphic nature of the figure).

The Chairman also noted the importance of recording the positive impacts of the proactive work that is done, and being able to tell the stories of our successes.

Ms Emily Jenke (NVC) asked whether there is an ability for the Chairman to talk about some of the broader existential impacts of bushfire and some of the positive achievements in his introduction in the Plan.

Mr Brett Loughlin (SACFS) noted that this discussion within the Committee highlights the significant challenges that we have in this space. By way of example, for an event such as Ash Wednesday – which had a significant impact on the State's psyche – data capturing what was lost in South Australia does not exist in any coherent format. In terms of Figure 12 in the Plan, he noted that attempting to capture all the relevant data would quickly generate a substantial body of work, so a line needed to be drawn somewhere regarding what is included in the available timeframe. However, in future there needs to be improved definition and capture of relevant cost/loss data from agencies.

The Chairman noted that insured losses can assist in capturing this data, but this doesn't pick up those that are uninsured.

In response to a question from Mr Peter White (PPSA), the Executive Officer noted that feedback on the Plan will be reviewed throughout the consultation period, and the aim is that there will be a consolidated summary provided to the SBCC by the consultation closing date or shortly thereafter.

Mr Graeme Brown (DIT) asked how the SBCC will manage any questions that the public has throughout the consultation period; and whether there will be any live public sessions.

The Executive Officer noted that a Frequently Asked Questions section can be attached to the YourSAy page if common questions emerge through feedback on the site, and this would be monitored. As the general community is not the primary audience of the Plan, there is no intention to provide face to face community information sessions.

In response to a question regarding involvement of local government in the consultation process, the Executive Officer noted that local government is represented on the Bushfire Management Committees (BMCs), and councils would be directly invited to provide feedback on the Plan through the BMCs.

Ms Fiona Gill (DEW) asked how the SBCC would address any issues raised through the consultation process that needed more time to work through.

The Chairman noted that the public consultation period on the Plan is fixed, and that there are significant pieces of work flowing from the Plan that would require further consultation. He also noted that it was likely some comments made during the consultation period would be outside of the scope of the Plan. As it is proposed that there will be an interim review of the Plan in 2 years, this will also provide an opportunity to assess whether comments not included at this point are relevant or not.

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Mr John Moyle (LGA SA) offered to speak with the Executive Officer regarding how LGASA could assist with the consultation process, in terms of the 68 member councils and also the community, if required – both through their website, and through direct mail-outs if necessary.

The Committee resolved as follows:

That the State Bushfire Coordination Committee endorse:

- *the final draft State Bushfire Management Plan 2021-2025 as circulated for public consultation, commencing on Monday 22nd March 2021 and concluding on 30th April 2021; and*
- *the proposed communication strategy to support the public consultation period.*

Moved: Mr Brett Loughlin

Seconded: Ms Justine Drew

Carried.

12. State Bushfire Coordination Committee Membership

The Chairman noted the briefing regarding membership of the SBCC.

The Committee resolved as follows:

That the State Bushfire Coordination Committee note the update regarding SBCC Membership.

Noted.

13. Bushfire Management Committee Items

13.1.1. BMC Membership Nominations

The Chairman noted the tabled updated briefing for Business Item 8.3.1, which included two additional nominations for the Flinders and Mid North Yorke BMC from ForestrySA.

The Committee resolved as follows:

That the SBCC confirm the requested appointments as being from agencies prescribed by the SBCC in the composition of the BMCs, and appoints the persons listed to the relevant BMC for the remainder of the current three year term of BMCs.

Noted. SBCC unanimously approved the nominations.

13.1.2. BMC 'Listening Tour'

The Chairman noted, having attended four or five BMC meetings throughout the listening tour to date, that each Committee has very different characteristics, informed by local fire history and regional communities.

The Committee resolved as follows:

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That the State Bushfire Coordination Committee note the briefing provided on the BMC 'Listening Tour'.

Noted.

14. Agency Reports

The Chairman noted that for today's meeting, verbal reports will be taken. However, as per the recommendation contained in the briefing on this matter, in future written reports will be requested from all agencies and verbal reports reserved for any urgent matters. In response to a question, he noted that there will be a reporting template provided, including questions to provide guidance on what is required.

The Executive Officer noted that the template provided will be an interim solution, as this will be updated and finalised in the context of the review of governance arrangements proposed in the SBMP actions.

SACFS (Mr Brett Loughlin):

Mr Loughlin noted that we are nearing the end of the Fire Danger Season (FDS). The BMCs are currently meeting and discussing dates for the cessation of the FDS. Those dates will be recommended to the SACFS Chief Officer for sign-off and gazetting where dates are different to those gazetted at the start of the season. If a BMC votes to keep an end date the same as originally gazetted there will be no further changes made. Due to the milder end to the season that we are currently enjoying, we may see the FDS end up to a fortnight earlier than gazetted in some places, which is positive when compared with last season.

DEW (Ms Fiona Gill):

A key issue for DEW is smoke management, and Ms Gill noted that she had met with the Minister this morning to review the issue. The Government has committed to an expanded burning programme for DEW, on public land for both DEW and SA Water, as well as the Burning on Private Land program.

The Adelaide Hills has one of its most ambitious ever autumn programs. However, the mild summer means both a late grape harvest, and great burning conditions. As such, there are significant levels of concern in the grape and wine sectors about burning. Ms Gill expressed that DEW want the SBCC to have confidence that there is extensive engagement occurring to address these concerns at a Ministerial level as well as at a Departmental level.

She noted there is commentary in the sector about suspending burning until the grape harvest has finished. However, there are also members of the community saying that they want the burning to happen, as they don't want bushfires to happen at a large scale again in the Hills.

DEW is managing this tension, and will proceed taking a risk based approach, in that they will not proceed with a burn if there is any percentage chance of smoke going over a vineyard.

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Ms Gill noted the broader issue of the lack of a policy position at State level between the industry and Government around smoke management, for the primary production sector in relation to stubble burning, and for DEW and others in relation to prescribed burning. She suggested that once the burning is completed, then that is something that may be discussed at a Departmental level and potentially be brought back to the SBCC.

DIT (Mr Graeme Brown):

DEW has been doing some work with DIT in terms of assistance with facilitation of burns from a track and network perspective, and a traffic management perspective. DIT are trying to make it significantly easier for DEW undertake burns adjacent to roads.

DIT is also undertaking an internal review of their vegetation management policy, and the implications of this with regard to bushfire management. There are ongoing discussions with SACFS regarding the road corridor and DIT's vegetation management approach.

AGD-PLUS (Ms Denise LeBlond):

As of this morning (19 March 2021) the Planning and Design Code has gone live. This represents the full operation of the new planning system, which can be accessed through PlanSA.

In late January / early February 2021, the State Planning Commission (the Commission) endorsed a proposal to initiate a Bushfire Code Amendment. In essence, under the new Planning and Design Code there are a series of overlays representing bushfire risk for the purpose of assessing development. This Code Amendment represents the opportunity to review those overlays and look at including some additional bushfire mapping that was done about a year ago.

In response to a question from Ms Monique Blason regarding the process of the Code Amendment, Ms LeBlond reported that there are different avenues through which a Code Amendment can be initiated. In a development-type Code Amendment, a proponent (e.g., a developer) who wishes to do a site-fix only, applies to the Commission to do what would be called a 'typical' Code Amendment. Alternatively, the Commission itself can instigate a broader review of an aspect of the Code, and that is what has happened in this instance. Following this, there is a statutory consultation process.

SAMFS (Mr Peter Button):

SAMFS are also grateful for the mild season, but are continuing to monitor existing conditions of the day. Mr Button noted the service has been fortunate in that they haven't had to elevate their level of preparedness very often this season, and there have only been a couple of days where they have had to elevate the number of resources they have brought online. SAMFS continue to support whichever control agency needs support throughout the season.

They have purchased some significant communications and navigation equipment for their strike teams to support operational command, if the need arises.

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PPSA (Mr Peter White):

Following on from the DEW report, Mr White reported that many farmers have commenced burning off, and noted some issues. On Wednesday this week, there was a significant inversion layer and the smoke sat. Luckily it drifted north and not south towards vineyards down at Coonawarra.

He noted that it is extremely difficult to balance the preparation of farming land and the issue of smoke management, and that he has noticed whenever a rain event is forecast, numerous burns will be done. The tension between these two issues are a cause for concern, and needs to be addressed.

The Chairman noted that this is going to be a constant and growing tension, and a challenge that the SBCC will have to address in some way.

SAPN (Ms Ali Walsh):

Ms Walsh noted that there are no new updates on SAPN's work with CSIRO.

SAPN has joined the International Wildfire Risk Consortium, which involves power utilities around the world learning about best practices for managing wildfire risk. It is California-based, hence the use of the term 'wildfire'.

CCSA (Mr Mark Ashley):

There is a high degree of interest in the draft State Plan from the conservation sector. Mr Ashley noted that CCSA will be running a series of workshops regarding the Plan over the coming month, and noted with thanks the offer of support from the Executive Officer around the feedback process.

ForestrySA (Ms Monique Blason):

Ms Blason noted that it is business as usual for ForestrySA with no specific matters to report.

PIRSA (Ms Justine Drew):

Ms Drew noted that PIRSA are to be involved in a workshop next week regarding smoke taint and the Open Burning Code of Practice. Based on comments from today's SBCC meeting, she will gather some more information about this, and discuss with colleagues how the Code could be brought forward or expanded.

Mr Loughlin (SACFS) noted that there is a section of PIRSA working on review of the Code, and there is potentially a draft proposal that will come to the SBCC, to insert some wording into the Open Burning Code of Practice about a recommendation that landowners consult the BoM, and compile also a list that the vignerons will put together so that people will be able to find whether they have vineyards within a certain radius of their property.

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SAPOL (A/AC John De Candia):

Operation NOMAD continues and there have fortunately been limited activations. With SAPOL's commitment to the COVID-19 response, there are resultant significant impacts on staffing resources.

LGA SA (Mr John Moyle):

Mr Moyle had no specific matters to report.

OCA (Mr Mark Sutton):

Mr Sutton noted that there was not much to report from the Outback. Due to COVID-19, they are seeing a rise in domestic tourism, and subsequently seeing a minority of people coming to the region and not behaving well, which will impact existing emergency services resources moving forward.

CFSVA (Mr Andrew Cadd):

Apart from a few fire events, there has been less fire activity this year. In regard to the issue of smoke management, Mr Cadd noted that in the Mid North and Yorke Peninsula areas there has been a dramatic reduction in the area of land that is being burnt off over over the last 10 years. This has had a direct result on reducing the amount of smoke, and also on the amount of work for rural volunteers in chasing out-of-control fires. He noted that this is due to farming practice technology and machinery and he predicted that we will likely see further improvements in this as time goes by.

BoM (Ms Kylie Egan):

Regarding the issue of smoke, the BoM is working with CSIRO on a better smoke modelling programme. There is a meeting next week with a few agencies in relation to when this programme will roll-out to South Australia. This programme will enable BoM will be able to pull in hotspots of any going fires, planned burns, and data from any air-quality measurements obtained from other agencies, and it will be possible to get an overview of the State of how many fires could potentially be burning on any day, and where the smoke is likely to be travelling, taking into account elements such as inversions and wind direction.

In terms of situational awareness with regard to the weather, it is expected that there will be significant rain across the northern areas of South Australia from Sunday through to Tuesday, potentially falls of 60-80mm, with potentially isolated areas of up to 100mm. This will likely impact on road closures, and industry in the north-east of the state.

In regard to longer-term weather trends, the La Niña is weakening, so the wetter-than-average signal will start to decrease, and it is looking like we will move into more of a neutral phase for our weather patterns through winter.

There is a new radar at Mildura, which has good coverage through the Riverland. This is able to detect not just if there is particles or rainfall, but is also able to detect what type of particles and their size and shape (e.g., hail, smoke, etc).

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NVC (Ms Emily Jenke):

The NVC is not currently constituted, as it is pending ministerial appointments, so the Council is operating under delegation at the moment. The Council terms lapsed approximately one week ago.

SA Water (Mr James Crocker):

Mr Crocker noted that SA Water is working on recovery from the Cherry Gardens fire, which burned about 1,900ha of the Mount Bold Reservoir reserve. There is about 15km of boundary fencing that is being replaced, as well as some flow-monitoring and telemetry stations that are important for monitoring the water flow into Mount Bold. Interestingly, even things like carbon offset plantings need to be dealt with and replaced.

DEW have commenced the prescribed burning program that they deliver on SA Water's behalf, and an interesting burn has just been undertaken at Finger Point in the south-east near Port McDonnell, which involved use of cultural fire management practices with the local Boandik community helping to do the burn.

SA Water are implementing some findings from an audit they did following the Kangaroo Island bushfires into the vulnerability of some of their assets, and considering how they may make these more resilient. Mr Crocker noted that while they have always considered fire management, and had thought they were doing the best things with the assets, they are looking at lessons learnt out of this incident which is involving assessment of assets in high fire-risk areas across much of the state.

The Chairman noted the growing importance of critical infrastructure protection.

The Committee resolved that:

That, as an interim reporting arrangement, member agencies and organisations of the State Bushfire Coordination Committee provide written reports on their activities in relation to bushfire management to the Committee, two weeks ahead of scheduled Committee meetings for circulation with meeting papers.

Noted.

15. Other business

The Chairman noted that from a SACFS perspective on Monday the following week, SACFS would be releasing a debrief report from the Kangaroo Island fires to their officers on Kangaroo Island. He noted that it is a technical and comprehensive piece of work incorporating the inputs from many people. SACFS has taken what the consultant produced and will publish it all. It is expected that there will be significant media coverage regarding the report.

16. Meeting Close

The meeting was closed by the Chairman at 10:29 hrs.

Next Meeting – Friday 14th May 2021, 09:00hrs



Government
of South Australia

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Endorsed on 14 May 2021 by the State Bushfire Coordination Committee as a true and correct record of the meeting held on 19 March 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Georgie Cornish', written over a horizontal line.

Ms Georgie Cornish

Chairperson

14 May 2021