

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL BUSHCARE REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 4 December 2018
Location: Jervis Bay Rooms, City Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra
Time: 10.04am

The following members were present:

Clr John Levett – Chairperson
Frances Bray
Mike Clear
Tony Jennings
Bill Pigott
Len White

Others Present:

Alasdair Stratton – Natural Resource & Floodplain Manager
Peter Swanson – Bushcare Coordinator

Acknowledgement and Respect for the Traditional owners and Elders past and present.

Apologies / Leave of Absence

Apologies were received from Clr Findley, Clr Gash, Kelly Cowlshaw, and Bryan Lenne.

Confirmation of the Minutes

Bill Pigott gave the following correction to the Minutes of the previous meeting: On the last page, where he is signing as Acting Chairperson, he should not be listed as “Clr”.

RESOLVED (Mike Clear / Len White)

That the Minutes of the Council Bushcare Representative Group held on Wednesday 21 February 2018 be confirmed.

CARRIED

Declarations of Interest

Nil

BR18.10 Business Arising from Previous Minutes

Relationships with Local Aboriginal Land Councils:

The September 2017 meeting had noted that Council had consulted with Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) and added this process to the Bushcare Policy, and had also been invited to regular meetings of the LALCs (BR18.4). Council now has a Memorandum of Understanding with Jerrinja LALC. Feedback from Jerrinja LALC on the MoU has been positive.

A future meeting of this Group will be held in Ulladulla to facilitate participation by the Ulladulla LALC.

Bill Pigott noted the reappointment of two Indigenous bush regenerators signalled that the bushcare community needs to highlight the involvement of the Indigenous community. He proposed an event or gathering to further encourage the LALCs to participate in bushcare. Alasdair Stratton recommending arranging separate events to involve the respective LALCs in Nowra, Jerrinja and Ulladulla.

This should not be an open invitation but targeting those with an interest in bushcare.

It will be important to establish connections with the LALC communities before encouraging their participation on site, as there are sensitivities around the land (e.g. potential desecration) that should be identified first.

Alternatives to plastic tree guards:

Peter Swanson has emailed information to the Group members. Wire mesh guards have been used in some situations. Plastic sleeves are cheaper, but they may not necessarily be used in future. Wax cardboard biodegradable guards are available, which will be useful in sensitive areas. It was confirmed that plastic guards can be recycled. It was agreed that guidelines on the use of plastic tree guards will be built into the Procedures..

Recommended (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That Council staff

1. Circulate a letter inviting Nowra, Jerrinja and Ulladulla LALCs to participate in an event to meet Bushcare volunteers; this letter is to be sent to the Bushcare Representative Group in draft for approval before sending to LALCs.
2. Add guidelines on the use of plastic tree guards in the Bushcare Procedures..

RESOLVED (By consent)

That Council staff

1. Circulate a letter inviting Nowra, Jerrinja and Ulladulla LALCs to participate in an event to meet Bushcare volunteers; this letter is to be sent to the Bushcare Representative Group in draft for approval before sending to LALCs.
2. Add guidelines on the use of plastic tree guards in the Bushcare Procedures..

CARRIED

REPORTS

BR18.7 Bushcare Program Update - November 2018**HPERM Ref:
D18/398396**

Peter Swanson confirmed that recruitment of Indigenous bush regenerators is under way, and that the Bush Regenerator-Ganger position has been filled, but the Skilled Labourer position has not.

Bill Pigott noted that collecting information on volunteer hours is vital. It was clarified that hours are recorded on a calendar year basis, but this can also be done as the financial year. Data collection is ongoing and Council can report for any given period. Bill suggested that coordinators should be sent reminders to submit sheets. Reports are a significant tool in assuring bushcare budget allocations, and they remind bushcare workers of how their hours contribute to the total.

A comprehensive record of hours is also needed for insurance cover.

Staff were commended for the format of the report, including the images which were helpful.

Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That the Shoalhaven Bushcare program update report be received for information.

RESOLVED (By consent)

That:

1. The Shoalhaven Bushcare program update report be received for information.
2. Council staff communicate directly with Bushcare Coordinators regarding their volunteer hours returns.

CARRIED

BR18.8 Bushcare Group Action Plan Schedule**HPERM Ref:
D18/398859**

Staff clarified why the figure of six years had been chosen. Council has 68 Action Plans, and in looking at the timeframe to review a plan it was calculated that six years would be needed to get to each one.

The Action Plans are a guideline, setting out what a group is aspiring to over the time period and providing a benchmark against which to review achievements. It gives volunteers permission to work on the land and authority to act in a general sense.

There was a short discussion about how to present the benefits of the recommendation to Council. For example, the longer intervals between reviews will save staff time and therefore funds.

To ensure that Council remains informed it was proposed that the groups be asked to write a progress report periodically about what is being achieved. It was agreed that Council's Bushcare Field Officers could lead on this, recording the data they capture in a progress report and submitting it to each group. This will aid tracking progress against the plan. A brief guide to what is needed can be prepared.

Recommendation

That the Bushcare Representative Group support changing the review period of the Bushcare Group Action Plans from three (3) years to six (6) years.

RECOMMENDATION (By consent)

That

1. The Bushcare Representative Group support changing the review period of the Bushcare Group Action Plans from three (3) years to six (6) years.
2. Individual Bushcare groups provide annual interim reports through Council's Bushcare Field Officers.

CARRIED

BR18.9 Bushcare Procedures**HPERM Ref:
D18/397010**

Peter Swanson gave a presentation as a precursor to the short workshop.

The Bushcare Procedures have been developed since 2005. The Policy was separated and revised this year, and it is now time to revisit the Procedures.

The current procedures cover: How a new Bushcare/Parkcare group starts; Who can volunteer; Training; Record keeping; Group action plans; Grants from external sources; Financial arrangements; Supervision and coordination; Road Safety; Insurance; Tools and equipment; Rubbish removal; Publicity and promotion.

In Peter's opinion, overall the existing procedures work well. They provide a clear set of rules for the operation of the program. The processes allow for easy registration of new volunteers. The database that has been developed provides readily accessible information on volunteers and volunteer hours.

He felt there is room for improvement in these areas: Starting new groups; Permitting system is not applied; Training obligations on Council are probably overstated; Working alone is not permitted; Updated reference to pile burning guidelines.

The revised policy adds headings on Cultural Heritage; Engagement; Best Practice; Measurement of Outcomes; Communication of outcomes; and Fostering Cooperation.

Peter noted the use of new technology, such as iAuditor, which Field Officers use to collect data.

Alasdair and Peter will compile the Group's comments into a discussion paper, circulate it to Group members, then incorporate agreed suggestions into the Procedures.

Question 1: What do you think is working well?

- Support workers (i.e., Bushcare Field Officers)
- The general appreciation among Councillors for what Bushcare does
- The Action Plan concept as an objective reference point
- Provision of tools and equipment
- Annual gathering of bushcarers and parkcarers
- Social engagement in groups
- Council's Bushcare Representative Group as a platform
- Framework for community consultation
- Provision for temporary membership
- General flexibility of the procedures
- Availability of technical information onsite
- The community development aspect, and building social capital
- Emails and letters reminding residents of working bees
- Improvement in the environment, and ability to demonstrate outcomes
- Signage, although this needs to be in the procedures

Question 2: What do you think are the most important areas for improvement?

- More focus on skills training, e.g. first aid, community relations / conflict resolution
- Field officers supplying tool belts instead of requiring volunteers to retain them
- Dialogue between groups and Council – for example the recent committee disbandments and Collingwood Beach issues were not managed well
- Action plans can be over-prescriptive
- Monitoring and record-keeping
- Need a meeting of coordinators to share learning and best practice – the group's 'representativeness' can be improved
- Lack of contact with neighbouring bushcare groups. Also improving understanding of Aboriginal land management
- Physical or mental fitness of volunteers; practical preparedness of volunteers, e.g. appropriate clothing
- Vetting of volunteers
- Persistently reapplying volunteers
- Interface between the group and the local community – Councillors as well as locals. Councillors should be advocates for the bushcare program.
- Raise awareness of Council's four core values – collaboration, adaptability, respect, and integrity
- Age of volunteers – to ensure they are fit for the site but without discriminating
- Working alone
- Community consultation on action plans
- Handling community justice issues for young people on placement – supervision, Working with Children checks; also work with schools
- Use of teams from the gaol
- Pile burning – RFS information
- Training or induction, e.g. in using Roundup independently
- Length of volunteering before giving access to training
- How frequently a volunteer must participate to remain registered
- Use of power tools – flexibility to use on Saturdays, for example
- Group action plan – monitoring & data collection / evaluation
- Funding from Landcare that may be used on a Bushcare site
- Use of other organisations' equipment
- A mechanism to extract a condensed 4-page brochure for volunteers from the Action Plan
- Provision to obtain permission to work outside the area specified in the Action Plan
- Selection of group coordinators, e.g. conduct a vote in the presence of a Field Officer
- Appoint deputy coordinators to ensure leadership and succession planning
- Reimbursement guidelines for tools & equipment
- Media and publicity information on websites and social media
- Ability for groups to work on land tenure other than Council
- Volunteers to state pre-existing conditions on the sign-in sheets – for insurance purposes

Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That the report on the proposed review of the Shoalhaven Bushcare/Parkcare procedures be received for information.

RESOLVED (By consent)

That:

1. The report on the proposed review of the Shoalhaven Bushcare/Parkcare procedures be received for information.
2. Council staff consolidate the workshop comments and circulate to group members and feed back.

CARRIED

GENERAL BUSINESS

Bill Pigott announced there will be a Seniors' Walk taking place at Moeyan Hill Bushcare site during Seniors' Week on 18 February, at 10.30am. This will be the seventh of these events.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded, the time being 12.00pm.

Clr John Levett
CHAIRPERSON