

## Natural Area Volunteers Group

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, 19 June, 2024  
**Location:** Jervis Bay Rooms, City Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra  
**Time:** 4.00pm

**Please note:** Council's Code of Meeting Practice permits the electronic recording and broadcast of the proceedings of meetings of the Council which are open to the public. Your attendance at this meeting is taken as consent to the possibility that your image and/or voice may be recorded and broadcast to the public.

### Agenda

1. **Meeting Conduct Statement**
2. **Acknowledgement of Country**
3. **Apologies**
4. **Confirmation of Minutes**
  - Natural Area Volunteers Group - 18 July 2023..... 1
5. **Declaration of Interests**
6. **Reports**
  - NA24.1 Resignation - Membership - Expression of Interest ..... 4
  - NA24.2 Bushcare Program Update..... 5
  - NA24.3 Bushcare Fact Sheets..... 9
7. **General Business**

**Membership**

Clr Christen – Chairperson  
All Councillors (observers)  
CEO (or Nominee)  
Mr Tony Jennings  
Mr Len White  
Mr Wayne Pearce  
Ms Siobhan Berkery  
Mr Roger Hart  
Mr Paul Hayden  
Ms Kelly Upton  
Ms Emma Williams  
Mr Michael Shaw  
Mr Jason Carson – Local Land Services  
Representative – Office of Environment & Heritage

Quorum – 5 (One (1) Councillor and Four (4) Community Members)

Note: Any non-voting Councillor in attendance at any Committee Meeting may act as an alternate voting member in circumstances where achievement of a quorum is required, noting that this doesn't apply when quorum specifies the quorum to require community member attendance.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Natural Area Volunteers Group is to act as an advisory and representative group on all matters relating to the future directions of the Bushcare Policy and program (MIN10.1461).

**Role**

To meet the 'Purpose' above, the Group will advise Council on strategic matters pertaining to the Bushcare Program. This will include policies, procedures, resourcing, natural resources management, environmental restoration and preservation techniques and plans, and community and volunteer stakeholder engagement. Natural Area volunteer groups include those managed under Council's Bushcare program that predominantly work on Community Land categorised as 'Natural Area' (Local Government Act 1993). These include Bushcare, Dunecare and similar groups.

## MINUTES OF THE NATURAL AREA VOLUNTEERS GROUP

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, 18 July 2023  
**Location:** Jervis Bay Room, City Administrative Centre, Bridge Road, Nowra  
**Time:** 4.00pm

The following members were present:

Clr Evan Christen - Chairperson  
Clr Patricia White  
Mr Tony Jennings  
Mr Wayne Pearce  
Ms Siobhan Berkery  
Mr Jason Carson  
Mr Paul Hayden (Remotely – joined at 4.15pm)

Others Present:

Mr Michael Smith – Coordinator – Bush Care  
Dr Michael Roberts – Manager – Environmental Services  
Mr Peter Swanson – Lead – Land Management  
Ms Kerry Thompson – Natural Areas Operations Officer

### Apologies / Leave of Absence

Apologies were received from Roger Hart and Len White.

### Confirmation of the Minutes

**RESOLVED** (By consent)

That the Minutes of the Natural Area Volunteers Group held on Monday 16 December 2019 be confirmed.

CARRIED

### Declaration of Interests

Nil

## PRESENTATIONS

**NA23.1 Case Study of Narrawallee Bushcare Group - Michael Smith**

**HPERM Ref:  
D23/233017**

Mr Michael Smith presented on what makes a successful Bushcare Group. The information presented will be attached to the minutes.

## REPORTS

**NA23.2 Bushcare Program Update**

**HPERM Ref:  
D23/174400**

Clr Patricia White requested an information day be organised for Councillors and Natural Areas Volunteer Group to attend the Community Nursery Bushcare Group.

### **Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)**

That

1. The Natural Area Volunteers Group receive this update on the Bushcare Program for information.
2. An information day be organised for Councillors and Natural Areas Volunteer Group to attend the Community Nursery Bushcare Group

### **RESOLVED (By consent)**

That

1. The Natural Area Volunteers Group receive this update on the Bushcare Program for information.
2. An information day be organised for Councillors and Natural Areas Volunteer Group to attend the Community Nursery Bushcare Group

CARRIED

**NA23.3 Bushcare Procedures**

**HPERM Ref:  
D23/218640**

The Group provided feedback to staff advising that the procedures document may be too technical and lengthy to be of use to Bushcare Volunteers and suggested that staff create succinct fact sheets with key information referencing the procedures document.

### **Recommendation**

That the Natural Area Volunteers Group provide feedback on Bushcare related aspects of the draft Bushcare/Park care Procedures.

### **RECOMMENDATION (By consent)**

That the Natural Area Volunteers Group

1. Endorses the Bushcare related aspects of the draft Bushcare/Park care Procedures.
2. Request that fact sheets be produced in collaboration with Bushcare volunteers to ensure the procedures are understandable and provide a means for volunteers to provide feedback to Council.

CARRIED

## GENERAL BUSINESS

### NA23.5 Additional Item - Central District Bushcare Officer

Clr Christen proposed that Council fill the Central District Bushcare Officer role immediately to maintain function, morale, supervisory responsibilities particularly from a Work, Health and Safety legislative obligation perspective (as volunteers are defined as workers under the Work, Health and Safety Act 2011) and equity across the Bushcare districts.

#### **RECOMMENDATION** (By consent)

That Council consider filling the Central District Bushcare Officer role to maintain function, morale, supervisory responsibilities particularly from a Work, Health and Safety legislative obligation perspective (as volunteers are defined as workers under the Work, Health and Safety Act 2011) and equity across the Bushcare districts.

CARRIED

### NA23.6 Additional Item - EOI Process

The Natural Areas Volunteers Group discussed go out for another Expression of Interest (EOI) process to fill the two vacant membership positions on the Natural Area Volunteers Group

#### **RESOLVED** (By consent)

That Council promote the EOI process to the wider community to encourage applications to fill two vacant membership positions on the Natural Area Volunteers Group

CARRIED

### NA23.7 Additional Item - Thank you to Bill Pigott

The Natural Area Volunteers Group were notified that Mr Bill Pigott had resigned and it was recommended that a letter be sent to Bill Pigott thanking him for his contribution to the Shoalhaven environment.

#### **RECOMMENDATION** (By consent)

That Council

1. Accept the resignation of Mr Bill Pigott
2. Send Bill Pigott a formal letter thanking him for his contribution to the Shoalhaven environment.

CARRIED

There being no further business, the meeting concluded, the time being 5:24pm.

Clr Evan Christen  
CHAIRPERSON

## NA24.1 Resignation - Membership - Expression of Interest

**HPERM Ref:** D23/367954

**Department:** Business Assurance & Risk  
**Approver:** James Ruprai, Director - City Development

### Reason for Report

To advise the Natural Area Volunteers Group of the resignations received from Ms Frances Bray – Community Member (Lake Woollumboola Bush Care) and from Ms Diana Lindsay (Callala Bushcare).

### Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That:

1. The Natural Area Volunteers Group accept the resignation received from Ms Frances Bray (community member) and thank her for her commitment to the Committee.
2. The Natural Area Volunteers Group accept the resignation received from Ms Diana Lindsay (Callala Bushcare) and thank her for her interest in the Committee.
3. The vacancies be filled via an Expression of Interest as per the Terms of Reference.

### Options

1. As recommended

Implications: The membership of the Natural Area Volunteers Group will be reviewed and updated accordingly.

2. Adopt an alternative resolution with direction for staff.

Implications: Unknown

### Background

Council has received notification from Frances Bray dated 6 September 2023 via email, indicating that she is no longer able to attend meetings of the Natural Area Volunteers Group and therefore wishes to submit her resignation.

Ms Lindsay notified Council on 12 February 2024 via email, indicating that she can no longer be involved in the Committee.

### Community Consultations

Council staff have contacted all the Volunteer Coordinators seeking nominations for membership.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference in relation to Community Member Appointments:

- *Nominations should be advertised throughout the community via an Expression of Interest (EOI) process.*
- *Appointments to the Group will be for a three (3) year term with a set commencement and finish date. Vacancies which are filled during the Group's term will have the same finish date.*
- *Vacancies will be advertised to all registered Natural Area volunteers by the Bushcare Coordinator.*

## NA24.2 Bushcare Program Update

HPERM Ref: D24/154563

Department: Environmental Services

Approver: James Ruprai, Director - City Development

### Reason for Report

This report provides an update on the Bushcare Program.

### Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That the Natural Area Volunteers Group receive this update on the Bushcare Program for information.

### Options

1. Receive the report as presented.

Implications: To provide an update of Council's Bushcare Program to the Natural Area Volunteer Group and to permit the dissemination of key information pertaining to this program.

### Background

The Shoalhaven local government area (LGA) contains numerous natural environments which provides high quality biodiversity values. This includes habitat for threatened species and ecological communities listed under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW) and/or *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).

Council manages approximately 3,300 hectares of Natural Areas across 240 reserves. Most of these reserves are located within or adjacent to urban areas and include a variety of natural habitats comprising bushland, wetland, escarpments, foreshores, and dunes. Such peri-urban environments have also been well studied to be capable of supporting psychological well-being of the community by lowering psychophysical stress, encouraging positive emotions, and aiding the renewal of cognitive resources.

Bushcare Volunteers have been and continue to be an essential element in maintaining and improving Natural Area reserves. The volunteers provide a high degree of value to the management of the Shoalhaven LGA natural areas, particularly in reducing the impacts of introduced and invasive weeds on environmentally sensitive areas.

This report provides an update on the Bushcare Program since the last Natural Area Volunteers Group (NAVIG) meeting in July 2023.

### Bushcare Program Update

Shoalhaven City Council's Bushcare Program has been operating for over 20 years. It employs a Coordinator - Bushcare and currently, two geographically based casual Bushcare Field Officers.

The central district Bushcare Field Officer position remains vacant. The July 2023 NAVIG meeting recommended to Council to consider filling this position to maintain Council's Work, Health and Safety legislative obligations, the function and morale of central district Bushcare Volunteers and equity across the Bushcare districts. This recommendation was supported by Council on 14 August 2023 (MIN23.432): *'That Council fill the Central District Bushcare Officer role as soon as possible to maintain function, morale, supervisory responsibilities particularly from a Work, Health and Safety legislative obligation perspective (as volunteers are defined as workers under the Work, Health and Safety Act 2011) and equity across the*

*Bushcare districts and if necessary, that funding be sourced at a future quarterly budget review*. Unfortunately, this position remains unfilled due to budgetary constraints.

The program continues to be supported by two part-time indigenous bush regenerators.

David Rush began in the role of Coordinator - Bushcare in mid-January 2024.

Each group has a Volunteer Group Coordinator and northern and southern district groups have the support of a Bushcare Field Officer (casual positions) to ensure safety and help strategically and technically guide groups in accordance with their Bushcare Group Action Plans. The central district groups are currently being supported by the Coordinator - Bushcare.

There are currently 59 active Bushcare groups (including Bushcare, Dunecare, Community Nursery and 'Friends of' groups) with approximately 660 registered volunteers. Not all registered volunteers are active.

The reported volunteer hours and the number of Bushcare groups reporting are illustrated in Figure 1. The amount of volunteer recording sheets for 2023 (43) is slightly lower than 2022 (47). However, the number of Bushcare volunteer hours recorded for 2023 is higher than that recorded for 2022.

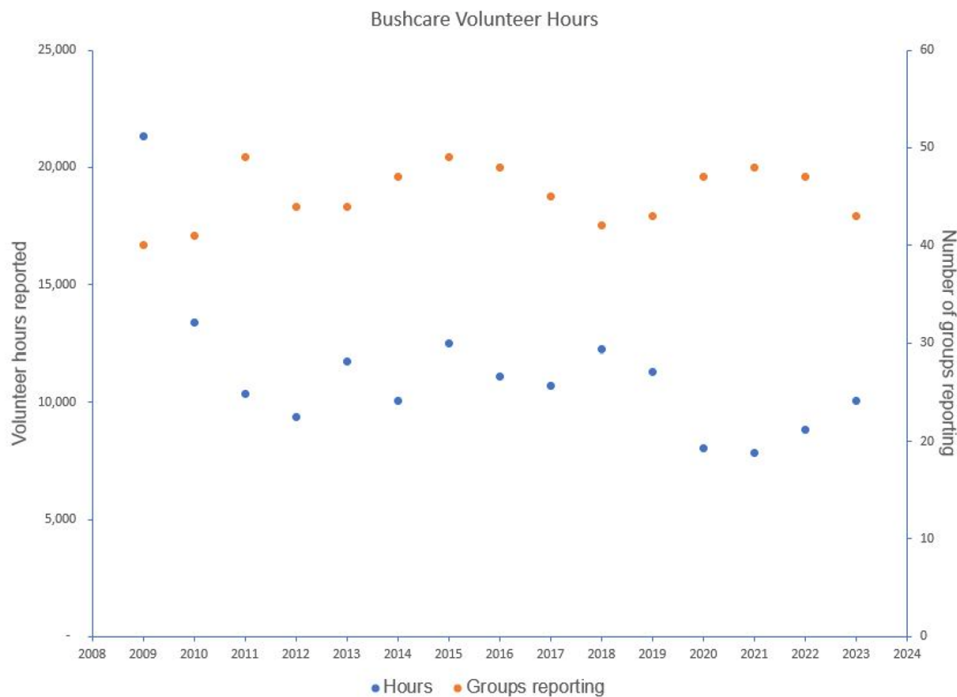


Figure 1 Bushcare volunteer hours and the number of groups reporting.

### Community Engagement

The Bushcare Links eNewsletter continues to be produced each quarter. There are currently just over 500 subscribers.

Other community engagement events that were conducted since the last NAVG meeting include:

- National Tree Day – Dolphin Point
- Bushcare/Parkcare volunteer Christmas picnic
- Trinity College (Woollamia Campus students) working bees at Currumbene Creek Reserve, Huskisson
- Shoalhaven Heads Botanical Gardens event.



## Bushcare Group Action Plans

The Coordinator – Bushcare is currently reviewing existing Bushcare Action Plans, and the writing of new plans where needed, to ensure that these are contemporaneous.

A prioritised list of all Bushcare Action Plans has been formulated. Those with the highest priority are new sites, and those that have older plans or changed site areas (e.g., Boongaree).

The following Bushcare Group Action Plans have been drafted and are currently being reviewed:

- Mahogany Creek
- Fishermans Paradise
- Bannister Head Road
- Wrights Beach.

The following Bushcare Action Plans are currently being drafted:

- Basin Walking Track
- Red Head Villages (Manyana, Cunjurong Point)
- Orient Point
- River Road (Shoalhaven Heads, Jerry Bailey Reserve).

Notably, the review of the Bushcare Action Plans is an action from a previous Council audit with a completion date of the 30 June 2024.

## Current Issues and Opportunities

Although the overall recorded volunteer hours indicate a positive upward trend since the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions in preceding years, the central district Bushcare groups do not have the same level of support as other areas. As this has led to the cessation of a group within this district, this may result in some natural areas receiving less volunteer hours.

A Work Health and Safety (WHS) audit of the Bushcare Program was carried out by Council in 2023. The following actions were derived:

- Site recording sheets - need to be reviewed to ensure that these are being filled in correctly and provided to Council.
- First aid kits – regular inspections and updating.
- Supervision - review of the Bushcare budget to ensure adequate resourcing and the determination of the level of supervision required under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW).
- New volunteers - development of an induction checklist.
- Training - provision of adequate WHS training.

The Bushcare volunteer registration database will be reviewed over the coming months. This will be carried out to ensure all active volunteers are included and that the records for those that are no longer volunteering are archived. This is done in collaboration with the Bushcare Volunteer Coordinators and was last done in 2022.

## Financial Implications

Between 2009 and 2023 (calendar years inclusive), Bushcare volunteers have contributed at least 168,900 hours. At a rate of \$40/hour, this equates to a total of \$6.76 million (an average

of \$450,401 per year). This represents a significant contribution to the improvement and maintenance of Council-managed Natural Areas.

For the 2023 calendar year, the recorded volunteers contributed 10,046 hours valued at \$401,820.

## NA24.3 Bushcare Fact Sheets

**HPERM Ref:** D24/229753

**Department:** Environmental Services

**Approver:** James Ruprai, Director - City Development

**Attachments:**

1. Draft fact sheet - Thinking of being a Bushcare Volunteer? [↓](#)
2. Draft fact sheet - Volunteer Bushcare Group Coordinator [↓](#)
3. Draft fact sheet - Bushcare Group Safety Checklist [↓](#)

### Reason for Report

To seek feedback on draft fact sheets prepared regarding the Bushcare Program

### Recommendation (Item to be determined under delegated authority)

That the Natural Areas Volunteer Group receive the draft fact sheets for information and provide feedback for their improvement.

### Options

1. The Natural Area Volunteer Group (NAVIG) receive the draft fact sheets and provide feedback to improve these.

Implications: Changes will be able to be made to improve the factsheets, which will then be made available to the public

2. The NAVIG provide other advice.

Implications: This will depend on the nature of the advice provided.

### Background

The Bushcare/Parkcare Procedures were tabled at the last meeting of the NAVIG. As a result, the NAVIG:

1. Endorsed the Bushcare related aspects of the draft Bushcare/Parkcare Procedures.
2. Requested that fact sheets be produced in collaboration with Bushcare volunteers to ensure the procedures are understandable and provide a means for volunteers to provide feedback to Council.

These recommendations were endorsed by Council on 14 August 2023 (MIN23.431).

Accordingly, there are three draft fact sheets attached to this report for review. These are:

- Thinking of Being a Bushcare Volunteer? (D24/229660)
- Being a Bushcare Coordinator (D24/227713)
- Bushcare Group Safety (D24/228190)

The intention is to create two additional fact sheets in the coming months. These will be:

- Establishing a New Bushcare Group
- Bushcare Group Action Plans.

## Thinking of Being a Bushcare Volunteer?

### Fact sheet

Shoalhaven City Council acknowledges the substantial contribution of Bushcare volunteers' efforts to help restore and maintain our city's natural area reserves. These reserves are managed to achieve outcomes such as biodiversity protection, providing for sustainable community use, and the protection of cultural heritage. The Bushcare Program aims to provide a framework for community to actively help care for these reserves.

**This fact sheet provides a summary of information for those considering being a Bushcare Volunteer.**

### Eligibility

The Bushcare/Parkcare Program is open to all residents, ratepayers, and visitors to the Shoalhaven, provided they operate in accordance with Bushcare Policy and Procedures. Volunteers participating in the Shoalhaven Bushcare programs must be over 10 years of age. School groups are eligible.

#### ➤ Working with children

In cases where volunteers will have more than incidental contact with children aged up to 16 years, individuals will be required to complete a Working with Children Check

#### ➤ Pre-existing conditions

Pre-existing conditions that may pose a risk are to be disclosed to Council upon registering and these will be passed on to the volunteer Coordinator of the relevant Group. Volunteers are only to take on tasks that do not pose unacceptable risks based on pre-existing conditions.

#### ➤ Volunteers with carers

Volunteers that have a disability and are supervised by a Carer are welcome to participate, undertaking appropriate tasks. The Carer and where possible, the carer's client, must register and undertake the corporate induction/park process. Site safety inductions must be completed by both.



### Temporary volunteers

Visitors, part-time residents, or event-based participants may volunteer by filling out their details, the date and signing on a Bushcare Site Recording Sheet before they work and provided they:

- Satisfy the age requirements for insurance.
- Are wearing the appropriate clothing.
- Are inducted on-site about the hazards and control measures that must be employed.

### Dismissal of volunteers

In instances of misconduct or breaches to the volunteer responsibilities, Council's Chief Executive Officer has the right to dismiss a volunteer. This includes:

- Theft of property or funds.
- Intoxication through alcohol or other substances while volunteering.
- Verbal or physical harassment of any other volunteers, members of the community or Council employees.
- Disclosure of confidential information regarding the Council and/or clients.

**Being a Bushcare Volunteer – June 2024**

- Breaching any other volunteer responsibilities or working contrary to approved works/plans.
- Malicious damage to Council or community property.
- Not working in a safe manner.

Volunteers will be informed of their right of appeal against any dismissal, managed through Council’s standard governance processes.

**Safety is everyone’s responsibility**

Most important is safety. It is a requirement that Bushcare volunteers exercise a duty of care to themselves, other volunteers, Council staff and the public. Shoalhaven Bushcare Volunteers must work safely, which means:

- Adopting a ‘Safety-First’ approach
- Be inducted and registered as a volunteer with Council
- Help identify hazards and communicate these
- Implementing controls to manage hazards (such as wearing Personal Protective Equipment)
- Notifying Council of any medical conditions that is likely to affect your duties as a Bushcare volunteer (so we can help manage these – not to stop you from volunteering)
- Notify your volunteer Coordinator of any near-miss, accident or injury
- Signing on at each working bee



**Training**

A variety of training and knowledge-sharing opportunities and materials may be offered and could include formal courses. Courses, workshops, and other educational opportunities will focus on local issues whilst offering the participants opportunities to develop a diverse range of relevant skills and knowledge.

Initially, Bushcare volunteers are required to complete Council’s Volunteer Health, Safety and Behaviour Induction. This can be completed on-line ([Apply to be a volunteer](#)).

Informal training in bush regeneration is provided on site, through peer knowledge and from Council’s Bushcare Field Officers. Council will also provide for formal accredited training for volunteers where needed and where resources allow.

**Volunteer Group Coordinators**

Bushcare Groups each have a Volunteer Coordinator, who provides the main contact for Council and helps direct the day-to day working of the group. Bushcare Volunteers are encouraged to consider becoming a Volunteer Bushcare Group Coordinator or Deputy Bushcare Group Coordinator. This can help to enhance your leadership, teamwork and group coordination skills.

**Change of circumstances?**

If for any reason you have a change in your details or circumstances, if you are unable to continue to be a Bushcare volunteer, please contact your volunteer Bushcare Group Coordinator or by emailing Council at [Bushcare@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Bushcare@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au).

**More info:**

For more information about your role and responsibilities as a Bushcare volunteer, visit Shoalhaven City Council’s Bushcare/Parkcare Procedures document [here](#).

**Contact Us**

[bushcare@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bushcare@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au)  
[shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/contact](http://shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/contact) | 1300 293 111





