

## **1.6 Mayoral Minute - Bush Fires**

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MANAGER:

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### **Bushfire event:**

On Thursday October 17 and Friday October 18, the northern part of Wyong Shire experienced a major bushfire emergency.

Close to 3,000 hectares of land was destroyed in one of the biggest fires in our region. Roads were closed, power was cut to communities and people were forced to evacuate to a centre set up at the Doyalson RSL Club.

One resident, 63-year-old Walter Linder from Lake Munmorah, tragically lost his life while defending his house at Carters Road, Lake Munmorah from flames when he appeared to have a cardiac arrest and could not be revived by paramedics.

Mr Linder was well known to Council, as he has been instrumental in transforming Toukley Arts and District Society, hosting key events and exhibitions. He was currently working with Council staff on a mural project for the Toukley Arts and District Society.

The art society committee had an emergency meeting on Tuesday morning, October 22 to discuss aspects of Mr Linder's devotion to the arts, and it has been suggested to have the mural, which is to be painted on the outside of the gallery, dedicated to Mr Linder and to have a plaque inscribed with his commitment to encourage the community to become more aware of our local artists. This mural project funded by Council reflects a true partnership with our community which Mr Linder was instrumental in establishing.

He will be sorely missed by the community and our condolences go out to Mr Linder's family and friends.

On Saturday, October 19 I toured the areas devastated by the fire, which extended from Ruttleys Road at Doyalson North to Swansea.

While touring these sites it was evident what an outstanding job fire fighters did to save houses and lives from the destructive path the fire took.

Due to their remarkable work, not one house was lost in Wyong Shire. A total of 238 firefighters comprising units from the RFS, FRNSW and NPWS worked overtime to save not just houses, but communities. Despite battling flames at times up to 40 feet, only two firefighters were treated for injuries.

All up, 36 tankers and three helicopters were used during the operation, which was fought in difficult conditions, in the middle of Thursday night, with shifting winds which constantly saw the fire breaking fronts.

Council was instrumental in assisting, with staff working around the clock at the Emergency Operations Centre set up at Wyong Shire's RFS headquarters at Charmhaven, which

Council funded and built.

Council provided equipment such as our bulk water tanker; placed our Charmhaven depot on standby for any mechanical work required; provided staff to undertake traffic control measures in the Chain Valley Bay and Lake Munmorah areas and provided a constant flow of information to our community through our social media channels and website.

In addition, we had a total of approximately 10 Council staff who were out fighting the fires as RFS and SES volunteers or as part-time employees with FRNSW.

It was amazing to see the number of emergency services organisations come together and all work for the one cause which was not only fighting the fires, but ensuring the safety of our community.

The community also came together, and offers of help flooded in especially on Council's social media pages.

Organisations such as Red Cross were on hand to help out at the evacuation centres, and Doyalson RSL Club (Doylo) opened its doors to help out both those evacuated and those stranded due to the road closures in the area.

The Salvation Army set up a post in the car park of Lake Munmorah Woolworths Shopping Centre over the weekend, providing food and drink to exhausted fire fighters.

Premier Barry O'Farrell visited Wyong Shire's RFS headquarters on Saturday, October 19 and promised funding to help people affected by fires, and to Council's who will continue to undertake clean-up operations.

**Recovery phase:**

On Monday, senior Council staff and myself attended a meeting with the State Government appointed Emergency Recovery Co-ordinator for the Hunter - former State Emergency Operations Controller Dick Adams - and representatives from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

The purpose of this meeting was to plan a co-ordinated and prompt response effort across different tiers of government and community organisations.

While the immediate fire danger has passed for now, there is still an enormous amount of work to be done in cleaning up the Shire. The first step is to get a clear picture of what we need to do and also what we can offer our residents.

Our crews have been on the streets since Friday cleaning up debris and ensuring roads and public places are safe. Their role is to assess the extent of damage to public assets like roads, buildings, and water supply infrastructure. We already know that there is a raft of signage that will need to be replaced and a timber bridge we'll have to repair - but we are continuing to build up a more accurate picture.

At this stage, we are yet to determine the full level of practical assistance we can offer individuals.

However, Council has initiated a number of items to assist our community recover from this event. This includes dissemination of detailed information to the community on various assistance initiatives, and organisations such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army assistance lines.

This information is now available extensively on a special page set up on Council's website.

Council is proposing to offer financial rebates to residents who were in the fire path for water used while attempting to fight the fires and save their properties.

Council and the State Government have also agreed to waive the waste levy fee for fire damaged waste originating from properties who were in the fire path, and will need to dispose this waste at our Buttonderry Waste Management Facility.

The State Government requires us to fund local emergency services to the tune of 11.7 per cent each year. This equates to Council spending \$2.2 million a year on local emergency service operations.

The RFS headquarters at Charmhaven was built and is owned by Council. We contribute up to \$850,000 a year towards Local RFS operations.

A breakdown of our emergency funding is:

**RFS:** \$540,000 (11.7% legislative requirement) and up to \$300k (in addition to any grants received to help support local RFS)

**NSW Fire and Rescue:** \$1,160,000 (11.7% legislative requirement)

**SES:** \$180k (11.7% legislative requirement)

**VRA:** \$20,000 (to local Volunteer rescue association)

Councillors and Council staff remain available to assist.

Anyone in the community who needs advice, or someone to talk to, should not hesitate to contact us for any assistance required or log on to our website for all the contact information required.

Council will continue to work with the State Government and organisations such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army and Human Services to provide all the assistance and support possible.

The bushfire was declared a Section 44 event.

***I formally move:***

- 1 *That Council receive an official report on the northern Wyong Shire bushfires.*
- 2 *That Council formally congratulate the RFS and NSW Fire and Rescue Service, and all other emergency and community services organisations, involved in this fire event.*
- 3 *That Council hold a civic reception for these services at the end of the bushfire season.*
- 4 *That Council strike a commemorative plaque in remembrance of Mr Walter Linder, and present this to the Toukley and District Arts Society for official mounting in their art gallery or mural.*
- 5 *That Council waive the fees for waste disposal of bushfire damaged waste resulting from this fire event at Council's Buttonderry Waste Management Facility*
- 6 *That Council offer a rebate to those properties located in the fire path for water used while fighting the bush fires.*

#### ATTACHMENTS

*Nil.*