



Post-fire Community Meeting

10am Saturday Dec 13, Cranbrook Hall, Tasman Hwy

How can we improve bushfire preparation to keep our properties safer and better support volunteer fire fighters

Present: Steve & Sue Barrett, Donna Button, Rob Churchill, Hugh Downie, Diane Flannigan, David Galloway, Peter Geard, Kerry & Paul Haddad, Barbara & Larry Ihlow, Don & Jen Jessup, Geoff & Marlene Jones, Vicki Jones, Robyn Moore, Robyn Pearshouse, Nick Shakel, Gary Stoward, Hayley Tristram, Lisa & Mick Verrier, Michael Viney, Jon & Martie Volbeda, Paul Walker, Fiona Warner, Brenton Wheare

Apologies: Sean Beggs, Deane Caldwell, Tony & Jodi de Cesare, David & Karen Crawford, Kelly Dyer, Tim Flanagan, Mark Fowkes, Jeremy Furniss, Paul & Paula Hanson, Sharon Henderson, Gillian Johnson, Fiona Joske, Yon Kikkert, Stu Kitto, Rick McMahon, Don McTaggart, Ruth McTaggart, Cassie Melrose, Scott Ragg, Leigh & Liz Sealy, Nicholas Shakespeare, Ann Sullivan, Emma Warnecke, Brigitte & Justin Wells, Mitty Williams

DSCA President David Galloway opened the meeting and acknowledged the traditional owners. He acknowledged those who've lost property, and also those who've experienced events directly. He thanked emergency services and members of the community who've been supporting each other. He noted that we are fortunate to have third parties, such as Red Cross and Tas Recovery, involved.

David observed that we are confronted with immediate and long-term problems. There have been 10 major fires in the last 12 years. The victim blaming in the media is totally unacceptable. We have experienced many false starts in getting problems addressed and we can't let this continue. Something must be done and we're best positioned to do it.

David explained the purpose of today's meeting: to hear about people's experiences—things that are working; and suggestions about how to improve in future. We'll use this information to develop a strategy to minimise the risk of this happening again. He outlined the structure of the meeting, stressing the importance of letting each person speak without interruption or discussion. He noted that it's not helpful to discuss the cause of the fire as this is being investigated.

GJ: there needs to be a fire ban from the end of Sept til the end of May. Also, council need to let people from DS and Cambria Drive take vegetation to the tip for free.

PH: property (in 400s) completely destroyed. Expressed commiserations to other families in the same situation. Had taken what they thought was every precaution, clearing, fire tank, etc. Those defences counted for nothing when fire wall came from the west. There was melted glass and melted aluminium, suggesting the fire was at least 800 degrees. Nothing could stop that. Dwelling was located near the coastal reserve. This created a particular vulnerability. Looking out from the deck to Swansea, there was an unbroken sea of coastal wattle for 5 kms. Fuel load was the critical issue. Other factors included wind and lack of aerial support. The fire was just unstoppable. Paul emphasised that we need to act now. Two suggestions: 1. Allow more subdivision as this will lead to more clearing. Everything we do impacts neighbours. We must act collectively. It's futile for one person to clear to protect their house. Council said caveat exists about subdividing, but this could be changed (= more rates). Paul recommends no more than 25% vegetation cover, ie remove 3 out of 4 coastal wattle. Less fuel load = less intensity = less destruction. Acknowledges fault for not clearing enough. RACT insurance have always had a policy to ensure everyone but are now reconsidering. Fear that insurance will be too expensive. Land values will plummet.

VJ: deep sorrow for people who've lost everything. Thanks to fires, Tas Networks and residents who stayed to fight the fire. Thanks to the Landcare group for mitigating fuel loads. People who shared on Facebook feed—so helpful during the fire. Found Tas Alert absolutely useless. Iphone 7 is now an unsupported device – got all info from social media. Further thoughts – may not be popular – but this is an opportunity for all of us to be very honest. 1. Priority should be prevention, not what happens once fire starts. What can we do to prevent fires? Don't believe that clearing is prevention. All clearing does is make fires less destructive once they start, rather than preventing them. We need more info out to new residents about prevention – what they can do to help us stop the fires being so frequent, eg the Dolphin Sand booklet (now updated and available as a pdf). Have done burns on block after educating self to ensure it doesn't get away. Doesn't matter what time of year it is, should always register our burn. Moved to DS because wanted a bush block. If wanted to live surrounded by lawn, would have bought in suburbia. Not going to clear it. Has made access for fires and cleared around house so it's defensible. Clearing takes away homes for wildlife. Shouldn't be destroying their homes for sake of ours. Moving to Bagot Point is useless. Wondering whether we create a situation of someone home near Bagot Point as safe house/refuge. Ideally, need some way to indicate who's home when the fires hit to save police wasting time.

PG: thanked fires and expressed grief for people who've lost property. Represents local govt at State Fire Commission. Will try to get burns happening. Not happy with council. Put 4 options to council regarding easement adjacent to his block. All refused. 2009 – fire affected property, but saved by a north-south fence—somewhere to fight the fire from. All gutters need to have gutter guard. Can provide info about burns and permits. Tas 95% fire prone. Just make sure to keep place clean to allow place to be defensible; keep burnable things back from your house.

PW: fire bans or fire restrictions need to have 'teeth' – must be taken seriously. Mandatory precautions necessary when using spark producing machinery. Strategic reduction of fuel load. Replanting with low flammability species. She Oaks survived well; other species burnt. Priority usage of the chipper/mulcher when received. Don't charge for locals to take green waste to tip. Proper and consistent tailored advice to property owners – has had conflicting advice. Need proper analysis, esp in terms of making buildings resistant. House survived. 1 part prep; 9 parts luck. Community vigilance in coming days and peak periods. Potential for looting. Be willing to challenge people.

GJ: block is clear. She Oaks round boundary. Parents were burnt out – lost everything. Helicopter able to land in yard because clear enough when neighbour had heart attack. Training essential when using chippers.

RC: councillor but present at the meeting as resident. Didn't lose as much as some. Feel for those who've lost home. Before built, land was totally burnt out (2009) – defined how house was built. 3 buildings on block. 20-30 metres around house that's green – no marram grass. Wattle close to house not burnt, Banksias close to house not burnt. When no marram under wattle, the fire stopped. It's not boobialla (myoporum) which is fire resistant. The wattle is not really that explosive. Wouldn't have believed it. Living in the middle of an acre of reasonable vegetation. Birds are coming back and wildlife. Stressful time for everyone. Rob's contact details are available on the council website. Working with an ecologist to come and have a look at it.

MVe: had old shack right near the coastal reserve (in 400s). More recently built something nicer that gets the view, further back from the beach. Shack and other infrastructure at the front gone – near coastal wattle. New place was defended by fires. Have done lots of clearing. Wide driveway, overtaking bay. Big gap round house, lots of gravel, defensible from fires' perspective. Water tanks – how do the fires know if they've been refilled? Need tighter arrangement to ensure filled and advise back to fires. 10-15 years ago – got Morey's to dig massive fire pit – 10m x 2m – fill it 4 times/year and burn it. Feel like a vandal but obviously necessary. Register it, do it during winter, monitor the whole time. Wouldn't have to burn all that stuff if there was council collection. Daisy growing on beach side at Lauderdale – grey foliage; yellow/white flowers (possibly African black-eyed daisy). Acts as a fast-growing ground cover to stop sand blowing everywhere; suffocates marram grass; stabilises dunes. Huge area beside house. Highly recommend it. Otherwise spend all our time pulling out grass. Locals welcome to drop in and grab a cutting. New residents need advice. Day before fire – saw someone burning off. Do new residents understand situation?

LV: has purchased boobialla myoporum – low flammability; also planted casuarinas and banksia and Oyster Bay pine. Pig face comes and goes. African daisy survives longer than pigface. If hadn't had African daisy in gully, would have lost house. Vine blue grey. Would really like to talk with the brigade that saved our house. We would like to thank them personally. Would also like to get an idea of the decisions they made. Has been in contact with a landscape architect whose speciality is planting after fires. Suggests a workshop/talk for community. Wildseed at Sorell also helpful.

RM: thanks to Paul Walker and Gary Goldsmith for helping protect her property. Has been in touch with RACT to recommend using property as a case study for a home that survived. Explained that she and Steve Barrett successfully applied for a National Emergency Management Grant for \$125K to support council to buy a chipper/shredder. Our aim is to provide an alternative to burning green waste. The machine is now in Melbourne and will be in GSB soon. Parks and Wildlife Service are responsible for managing the coastal reserve. RM asked them to put fire breaks in the coastal wattle, otherwise potential for it to act as a wick during a fire. RM offered to mulch any clearing they did. PWS declined.

RP: so sorry for everyone who lost property. Power and water off but once fixed, offer of house if any full-time resident needs a house. Get in touch with Robyn Moore. Air bnbs – need to utilise management people for tourists who want to have a fire on the beach. Suggests using less fire prone species for replating. However, this is expensive. A grant to support people to buy

appropriate species would be good. Include a QR code In Living at Nine Mile Beach booklet for registering burns.

RC: clears wattle when green; land needs the mulch – better than burning. Chips on the ground didn't burn. Heaps burnt. Might be able to do a bit of both.

SB: shared comments from people unable to be at the meeting. Cindy Hull & Peter Arthur. Cindy works for NRM south – opportunity to do replanting with appropriate species. Look at grants. Broad seeding. Great time to put water out for animals. When patrolling as volunteer fire fighter, SB saw several animals looking for water. Jonn Dick - experienced volunteer fire fighter from Swansea noted that it's hard to work out where specific properties are when it's dark and smoky. Suggested painting number on road in front of driveway with white paint– would help fires. Metal fire tanks done really well, but not plastic ones. At least one tank was empty because plastic fittings at bottom of tank had burnt.

PH: Rates officer from council has applied to valuer general to revise valuations of burnt properties. Promised updated figure by January.

DF: UTAS and RACT looking at fires in Dolphin Sands. When we first came here, were told to install plastic tanks. Conflicting advice.

DB: property on the loop at Bagot Point. Concerns, eg Tas Alerts useless – same info repeatedly. Husband TFS volunteer. Very effected by fires. When he came home, he was not well. Advice was we could not leave to get help. Also lives with blind, elderly mother. Very concerned about her. Had no visits from SES or police. Followed Tas Alerts advice that the road was closed and to stay home. Found out later that convoys had been operating to get people out. Why wasn't I told? Only messages from Tas Alerts were to stay there & stay vigilant. If you leave, you won't be allowed back. Would have got her mother out. Just wanted someone to say if you want to go, then go. Community needs info, not just select few who ring up or bother police. Not everyone is on Facebook. Need system in place so that those who are locked in and don't want to bother anyone can get information. Also system to know who's on site. Communication afterward for people who are literally stuck is important. Sorry for those who have lost their properties and have been impacted.

JJ: lost house in 400s. Been here for 40 years. When first moved, there was a little bit of coastal wattle and lots of open areas. Gradually, coastal wattle has increased. 20m clearance around house, fire tanks. Property burnt from beach right through to the road. When we brought transportable home in mid 1990s, cutting down coastal wattle to make space for it, neighbour complained. Don got phone call. Told not to cut coastal wattle down. Not going to let any of it grow on our block again. Should not be allowed to do any fires. Instead, we need free access to dump vegetation at tip. Called council – no reply. Daisy – that's all gone. One shed survived. Absolutely nothing anyone could have done. Molten aluminium and glass shows how high temperatures were.

DJ: would like information about how to dispose of blackened stumps.

RM: explained about the skip bins council has provided at Yellow Sandbanks Rd. Metal and gas bottles need to be taken straight to the tip (no cost) rather than put in skip bins. Tas Recovery are checking house sites for hazardous materials, and will organise clean up.

LV: Two calls from police. 1. Impacted but no details. 2. Lost house & shed. Police not aware there were 2 building on site, so were given misinformation – told we'd lost everything. Asked

about bridge to Coles Bay that's been investigated before. None of us want 2 lane highway down DS Rd, but need bridge to Swanwick. One lane – bollards for cyclists, pedestrians, ambulance. Can only evacuate to Bagot Point – not safe. Went through fire to get out. People should not be put in that situation. Just not right in 2025.

RM: Steve & Robyn have done a lot of work on bridge connection to Swanwick. We wanted to apply for a grant for a feasibility study but needed a letter of in-principle support for the study from council. The then General Manager refused.

GJ: There's a bridge near nursery around Launceston that could be used.

BW: lives in Cambria Drive. Asked about fire retardant mesh that Tas Networks installed on newer power poles. Has a sacrificial iron fence. Now planning to put a swale in front of it to catch embers.

GS: where the fire crept up to them – pole was saved by mesh. But if flames were higher, pole damaged.

NS: (800s) extremely grateful for info being provided on FB page. Can't begin to understand loss. We have big chipper, we chip everything. Has full time job in Launnie; will retire here in 5-6 years. Spends a lot of time preparing block – so much fuel load. Get a lot of solace by looking at cameras. Planning to put batteries on block so things run when power's off. High vantage point for cameras. Love to see repeated info online. Perhaps a subchannel on fb page for fire. Clearly a lot of burnable materials on the coastal reserve that we're not allowed to touch. It's a 30m tranche of material. What to do about that? FB page – fabulous. Qualified Dr; wife is pharmacist. Both at LGH. Willing to assist community when needed.

FW: marram grass is foe. I'd like to put water tank at front of property. Fire fittings – went to a lot of effort to find correct ones.

RM: explained that she had asked PWS to create fire breaks in coastal wattle. Even offered to mulch vegetation when we had a grant to do that. PWS declined. Even fire breaks have coastal wattle at the end of them.

?: Thanks for the info. Every time, the worst thing is communication. Needs fixing.

JJ: ABC think we're in south of state, but we only get radio reception from the north.

MVi: 2019 fire went through property on the loop at Bagot Point. Saw a Facebook comment from a TFS volunteer encouraging putting in correct fittings on water tank for fires to access water – better than going in the top of tanks. Wondering if fire fittings can be retrospectively put on tanks. What is capacity of TFS to carry water? Lots of tank water is not easily accessible which reduces ability to support fires when they are there. Suggests pulling out the coastal wattle early, then it's manageable.

RM: will investigate possibility of safer spot for refuge (as place of last resort) rather than Bagot Point.