

**Be Aware, Let's Prepare - Vincentia Community Meeting
14 Sept 2023**

The main take-home message:

MAKE YOUR BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN!

SPEAKER 1

Matthew Reeves, District Manager of Shoalhaven Rural Fire Service

The fuel loads are high in the areas not burned in the 2029-20 fires, and the major risk areas are north of Basin View to Berry, east of the highway which means we are sitting in an extreme fuel load area.

Local brigades have been undertaking *Operation Safer Shoalhaven*

- Identify prioritise and mitigate bush fire hazards
- Improve defensible space for operations
- Improve community preparedness
- Undertake operational exercising
- Improve area and hazard familiarisation

Everyone should be completing their [Your Bushfire Survival Plan](#) (on RFS website and attached to this email).

Ensure you speak with everyone in the household when making your plan when you are calm and can think clearly. There must be consensus - talk about the What ifs and various scenarios.

Think about access from Nowra, access to school and children, pets.

Don't shut yourself away from what is happening outside - don't lose touch with the environment. There must be a level of connectivity with your environment and this helps you understand risk and your preparedness.

During a bushfire it is not uncommon to

- lose power for days at a time because of damaged infrastructure or power isolated for safety
- have roads blocked by fallen trees and damaged infrastructure
- Lose access to goods and services – prescriptions, fuel, home care
- Loss of water supply
- Loss of access to EFTPOS

A plan allows you to have control. Things to consider:

Evacuate or relocate? RFS Preference is for you to relocate to the home of family or a friend – it is calmer, more comfortable. This should be part of your Bushfire Plan. Otherwise, you may only have the option of the Evacuation Centre, or Safer Place.

The closest designated Evacuation Centre is the Country Club at St Georges Basin, and our Safer Place is the Huskisson Public School.

Catastrophic fire days – do not be in fire danger areas. Use the fire ratings to make decisions about actions: https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/9428/Emergency-Bush-Fire-Information-and-alert-levels.pdf

Use Hazards Near Me app, set a watch zone.

<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/stay-up-to-date/hazards-near-me-nsw>

AIDER Program – to assist in preparing homes to reduce the bush fire risk.

The AIDER (Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents) program is a free, one-off service which supports some of our most at-risk community members.

The program helps people live more safely and confidently in their home in areas where bush fires may start.

The AIDER program is designed for people who have limited domestic support available from family, relatives, friends or other services. This could include older people, people living with a disability, and people who are already receiving community assistance and services. Their property must also be on bush fire prone land (land that can support a bush fire or be subject to bush fire attack).

AIDER services can include:

- clearing gutters
- thinning vegetation around the home
- removing leaf and tree debris
- trimming branches from close to the home
- mowing or slashing long grass.

https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/243259/AIDER-Factsheet-May-2022.pdf

The biggest “Take Home” Message from the RFS was to prepare your **Bushfire Survival Plan**

with **all members of your family**. Everyone was also encouraged to attend the Get Ready Days at the Vincentia and Huskisson Brigades over the following weekend - see attachment.

SPEAKER 2

Hannah Bennett, SCC Local Emergency Management Officer

LEMC - <https://www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/Emergencies/Local-Emergency-Management-Committee>

Hannah is responsible for preparing plans for response and recovery from emergencies with all combat agencies represented and working together.

SPEAKER 3

Christopher Firth, SCC Communication Officer

Chris worked on the Recovery into Resilience Project. Explained about the Hubs (closest one to Vincentia is Huskisson Community Centre).

The Hub provides reliable, accurate, timely, localised information which is transmitted by satellite and is not on communication towers (as mobile phones are).

Acting Inspector Paul Hover, LEOCON (Local Emergency Operations Controller)

Reiterated the need for everyone to have a Plan and emphasised the need to have adequate supplies of medication as Matt Reeves had previously emphasised.

POINTS TO COME OUT OF Q&A

Use of Community Fire Units – rather than trying to form a unit, the residents are encouraged to join local brigade.

Use of the Fire Trail at the top of Murray Street as an emergency escape route - The public should not be driving during a fire situation - leave early or prepare and stay with your well-prepared home. It is not advised or recommended for the public to be using fire trails at any time and especially not during an active fire scenario. The fire trail may well be impassable due to fallen debris, may be overrun by fire and it is needed for the RFS to control a fire and so cannot have members of the public using it and blocking access by fire trucks. There is also the issue of traffic congestion of Naval College Road.

Tourists – the RFS has Community Engagement information which is available to be placed in rental accommodation which agents will be asked to do. Possibility of using Tourist Leave Now Zones as were established during the 2019-20 fires.

Extreme fuel load in the National Park area at Blenheim Beach – RFS agreed to work with the resident.

Registers – a suggestion was made that registers could be compiled of people in Vincentia who could offer accommodation, properties with swimming pools, water tanks, solar panels, batteries. Also where doctors and pharmacists could be found. The use of a Facebook page with interaction with the local community could be a way forward

Water supply – it may reduce and be limited. If a resident decides to stay and has the appropriate clothing and equipment, they may be buddied up with a fireman to help protect their home.

Mobile phones – if a tower is lost to fire, other neighbouring towers will be used to bounce the signal. This allows texting but not phone calls.

Controlled Hazard Burns are only one pillar in preparing for the summer – high risk areas have been assessed, and 5,000 properties have been given protection in interface areas.

See VM website for information and links:

<https://www.vincentiamatters.org/letsprepare>