

# Bay & Basin Bushfire Preparedness Community Meeting

Thursday, 15 October 2026

## Executive Summary

Vincentia Matters organised and hosted the community bushfire preparedness session which brought together representatives from the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Police, Shoalhaven City Council, and the Australian Red Cross to provide practical advice on preparing for the upcoming bushfire season. The overarching message from all presenters was that while emergency agencies work closely together to protect the community, individual and household preparedness remains the most important factor in ensuring safety during a bushfire emergency.

Speakers highlighted that bushfire risk across the Shoalhaven and Bay and Basin region is increasing as vegetation continues to recover from the 2019-20 fire season. Combined with forecasts of warmer and drier conditions, communities need to be prepared for the possibility of significant fire activity.

Residents were encouraged to develop a written Bushfire Survival Plan, understand local risks, monitor official warnings, and make early decisions about relocating when conditions become dangerous. Particular emphasis was placed on planning for factors beyond the immediate threat of fire, including power outages, communication disruptions, road closures, access to medications, fuel supplies, and support for vulnerable family members.

The session also reinforced the importance of community resilience and recovery. Attendees were reminded that preparedness is not solely about responding to emergencies, but also about building connections, supporting neighbours, accessing available community resources, and understanding the services available before, during and after a disaster.

## Key Themes

- Bushfire risk across the region remains significant and continues to increase as fuel loads regenerate.
- Every household should have a documented bushfire and emergency plan.
- Early relocation is safer and more effective than last-minute evacuation.
- Preparedness should include plans for fuel, medications, communication failures, pets, and extended disruptions to services.

- Emergency agencies, Council and community organisations work collaboratively, but personal preparedness is critical.
- Community resilience, strong local networks and recovery planning are essential components of disaster preparedness.

## Overall Conclusion

The session's central message was clear: be prepared before an emergency occurs. Understanding local risks, having a well-rehearsed plan, staying informed and acting early can significantly improve safety and reduce the impact of bushfires on individuals, families and communities.

# Matt Reeves, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS)

**Key Messages:** Bushfire Risk, Hazard Reduction and Personal Preparedness

## Current Bushfire Risk

- Bushfire fuels in areas affected by the 2019-20 Currowan and Comberton fires have regenerated and can now readily sustain fire again.
- While fuel loads are not yet at pre-2019 levels, bushfire risk is steadily increasing.
- The Bay and Basin area has not experienced a major fire since 2001, meaning vegetation has accumulated to extremely high fuel loads.
- The key risk driver will be weather conditions. The fuel is present; severe fire weather could quickly create dangerous conditions.

## Lessons from Past Fires

- The 2001 Highlands Fire demonstrated how rapidly bushfires can spread, reaching Huskisson within hours of ignition.
- Even relatively small fires can threaten homes and require major emergency responses.

## Risk Reduction Efforts

- A comprehensive Bushfire Risk Management Plan has been developed through collaboration between the RFS, National Parks, Council and other land managers.
- Extensive hazard reduction burns have been completed across the Shoalhaven, particularly around Bay and Basin communities.
- Hazard reduction works are undertaken in a mosaic pattern to slow fire spread and improve firefighting opportunities over time.

## Community Preparedness

Every household should have a written Bushfire Survival Plan.

Plans should consider:

- Evacuation or relocation triggers
- Extended power outages
- Loss of mobile coverage
- Road closures
- Limited access to fuel, food and medication
- Relocating early is generally preferable to evacuating at the last minute.

- Residents should monitor Fire Danger Ratings and use the Hazards Near Me app to stay informed.

## Seasonal Outlook

Forecasts indicate warmer and drier conditions, particularly overnight, reducing the natural recovery period that typically slows fire activity.

A severe fire season can develop quickly following only a short period of hot, dry weather.

**Key Takeaways:** Be informed, have a written plan, understand your triggers for action, and prepare before conditions become dangerous.

## Acting Inspector Joel Latimer, South Coast Police

**Key Message:** The Police Role During Emergencies

### Emergency Management Role

During major emergencies, police coordinate and support a broad network of agencies through the Local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

Police focus on overall community safety rather than direct firefighting.

### How Police Support Communities

Police may:

- Assist with road closures and traffic management.
- Support evacuations.
- Deliver essential supplies and medications to isolated residents.
- Assist emergency services in maintaining community safety.

### Practical Preparedness Tips

Residents should:

- Keep vehicles fuelled during bushfire season.
- Maintain extra medication supplies where appropriate.
- Prepare an emergency kit or overnight bag.
- Consider safeguarding valuables if they may be unable to return home for extended periods.

**Key Takeaways:** Emergency preparedness includes more than protecting your property. Planning for fuel, medications, essential supplies and personal security can significantly improve resilience during an emergency.

## Richard Hart, Local Emergency Service Manager, Shoalhaven City Council

**Key Messages:** Emergency Management, Evacuation and Community Readiness

### Shoalhaven's Risk Profile

**Shoalhaven is one of New South Wales' most disaster-prone local government areas.**

Strong relationships between emergency agencies contribute to effective emergency responses.

### Council's Bushfire Responsibilities

Council manages Asset Protection Zones (APZs) and bushfire mitigation activities.

Regular audits ensure residents do not create hazards by storing flammable materials in protection areas.

### Evacuation Centre Realities

Evacuation centres provide safety but can be crowded, uncomfortable and lacking privacy. Where possible, relocating early to stay with friends or family is often a better option.

### The Importance of Early Action

Special consideration should be given to:

- Older residents.
- People with mobility limitations.
- Those dependent on medication or medical equipment.

Delaying evacuation can have serious consequences.

People should act early when advised by emergency services, particularly the RFS.

**Key Takeaways:** Know your risks, have a realistic plan, and leave early when conditions warrant. A temporary inconvenience is preferable to risking your safety.

## Samantha Stewart, Australian Red Cross

**Key Messages:** Community Resilience and Recovery Support

### Red Cross Role in Emergencies

Australian Red Cross supports communities before, during and after disasters.

Services include:

- Psychological first aid
- Family reunification through **Register.Find.Reunite**
- Recovery support and referrals
- Temporary accommodation assistance

### Community Education Programs

Red Cross delivers:

- Emergency Ready workshops for households.
- The Pillowcase Program for children and schools.
- First aid training.
- Psychological first aid education.
- Community resilience and preparedness programs.

### Preparedness Framework

Red Cross encourages households to:

- Get Informed.
- Get Connected.
- Get Organised.
- Get Packing.

### Local Volunteer Support

Red Cross maintains volunteer teams throughout the Shoalhaven to provide support before, during and after emergencies.

**Key Takeaways:** Building resilience is not only about responding to disasters. It is about strengthening community connections, preparedness and recovery capability long before an emergency occurs.

## Overall Themes from the Session

- Bushfire risk in the Bay and Basin area remains significant and is increasing as vegetation recovers.
- Every household should have a **written emergency and bushfire survival plan**.
- **Early relocation** is generally safer and less stressful than last-minute evacuation.
- Preparedness extends beyond property protection to include medications, fuel, communications, power loss and personal wellbeing.
- Emergency agencies, Council, Police and Red Cross work collaboratively, but **individual and household preparedness remains critical**.
- **Staying informed** through official warnings, Fire Danger Ratings and preparedness programs is essential.

## Question & Answer Session

### Q. Re EVs. Are they at risk of flashover fire?

EVs are well built and no more of a risk than petrol vehicles. The thing to consider though is in the case of an emergency evacuation is the car fully charged, and where can you expect to re charge in the event of power failures. (solar and storage batteries very useful). RFS bring in generators to suburbs without power, but only when it is safe to do so. Bawley Point and Kiola have a Community Microgrid, providing a resilient and renewable power supply. But this needs to be in place before a fire.

### Q. Evacuation Centres. / Emergency Information

Stressed that an evacuation centre was not pleasant, and to be used only as a place of last resort. Only three in the Shoalhaven. For us the nearest “safer place” is the Huskisson Public School. The Evacuation Centres are really to register you have left your home, or if you genuinely have nowhere else to go.

Emergency Information centres such as the one at the Huskisson Community Centre are a place to get information and leave. Has separate power and VOIP internet. Refrigeration available for medicines that need to be kept cool. Possible to do a quick phone charge. The electronic notice board updates regularly and quickly and is like the Hazards Near Me App.

### Q. Resident of Coastal Waters expressed his thanks for the excellent care taken of residents during the Larmer Ave fire not so long ago. Asked how Emergency Services deal with aged people who do not want to leave.

Explained that an assessment was made that it was safer to keep people in place and fight the fire to keep it away. Need too many ambulances and vehicles to evacuate around 200 people. Also risk of traffic accidents exiting onto the Wool Road. Between 50 and 60 fire trucks were employed for that fire, as well as an on-site community liaison officer who was there for three days.

### Q. Is it OK to take refuge on the beach?

Each case is different. Consider access, tides, vegetation beside beach.

### Q. What if the road is cut at Violet Clarke Reserve?

Greatest risk comes from ember attack. If it is the only exit, leave early.

## Q. Regarding Council clearing of Asset Protection Zones.

The APZ is measured from the rear of the dwelling, not the back fence, so a long yard can even mean there is minimal to no APZ behind the property. E.g. Could be 20 meters in your yard, and then 10 meters beyond it.

Case by case. Residents can contact the RFS to audit the cleared area if they aren't happy. Some areas cannot be burnt due to environmental factors. Eg the area between Vincentia Golf Course and the primary school has areas of endangered vegetation and at-risk species and is within the National park.

## Q. How resilient are the services here? Eg internet, power

Much better these days. Especially Telcos. The RFS trucks have Starlink so they retain connectivity. Advice is to have a backup plan and understand your risks. Said communities have lost the connection with their environment. Too focused on staying inside in the aircon. Need to check outside for wind, heat etc to know your risks. Be aware.

## Q. In Hyams Beach there is no Hub with the information screens. Can they get one?

NO. Each one costs \$95k to install and then \$170 K pa to operate. Unaffordable to have more. Likely there will be one installed in the Jervis Bay Territory as it will be Federally funded. In an emergency likely that RFS officers would go to (for example) the Vincentia shopping centre to provide advice and warnings in person.

## Q. Are recreational fires allowed?

If contained in a 1 metre by 1 metre area, yes. Eg a fire pit or BBQ. Pile burning in your yard is allowed with a permit from the RFS between October and March.

Permits suspended during at-risk periods. Get the Hazards App. Get the Emergency Plus App it has access to all emergency services.

Uses **What 3 Words** for location. Get to know how to use it, suggested having a sub folder on your phone for emergency apps.

## Q. How to manage tourists

With great difficulty especially if they have booked online directly. Use social media and radio etc. Relying on Airbnb operators to also provide information to guests.