

NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES

Report Author: EO Emergency Management

Responsible Officer: Director Communities

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

This report outlines the status of Bushfire Shelter options within the municipality of Yarra Ranges.

Annual Audits have been completed for the existing 18 designated Bushfire Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSP) - Bushfire Places of Last Resort. The 18 sites are designated NSP's and comply with the mandatory assessment criteria. As such, all 18 sites will maintain their status as designated NSP's for the 2023/24 fire danger period.

Three (3) existing Community Fire Refuges (CFRs) remain commissioned by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and will be retained within the municipality. These buildings are state owned managed assets, listed on both the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Yarra Ranges Council websites.

No additional NSP or CFR sites have been established for the 2023/2024 fire danger period.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Note the eighteen (18) Neighbourhood Safer Places remain designated for the 2023/2024 fire danger period, and;***
- 2. Note the three (3) Community Fire Refuges managed by Emergency Management Victoria remain designated for the 2023/2024 fire danger period.***

PROPOSAL

Council acknowledges the status of formal Bushfire Shelter Options within the municipality.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the Country Fire Authority Act, Victorian Councils are to identify, designate, establish and maintain suitable sites as NSP's in their municipal districts. The CFA conducts an annual assessment of each NSP to ensure compliance with the assessment guidelines.

Neighbourhood Safer Places, also known as Bushfire Places of Last Resort, are not intended to replace a personal bushfire survival plan. The CFA advises that everyone should have a written Bushfire Survival Plan and there is no guarantee that people will not be injured or killed by fire or radiant heat when travelling to or sheltering at a Neighbourhood Safer Place – Bushfire Place of Last Resort.

Following the introduction of the NSP legislation, Yarra Ranges has 18 designated NSP's within the municipality. Furthermore, the Victorian Government through EMV also commission three (3) CFR's within the municipal footprint.

In light of the coming fire season and proactively undertaking bushfire preparedness activities, confirmation of designated NSP's is part of Council's coordinated fire readiness activities completed in partnership with CFA and Victoria Police. Attachment One is the full list of designated NSP and CFR locations. This list will be updated and published on Council's website.

STRATEGIC LINKS

- Country Fire Authority Act 1958 - section 50J.
- Bushfire Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements - Royal Commissions website.
- Yarra Ranges Council Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan.
- Council Plan – Healthy & Connected Communities.

CONSULTATION

The Country Fire Authority, Victoria Police, relevant landowners/managers and Yarra Ranges Officers have been consulted throughout the NSP assessment process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All NSP sites are subject to ongoing maintenance and inspection programs which are maintained within the current operational budget.

KEY ISSUES

Environmental Impacts

In meeting the criteria for ongoing designation as an NSP some vegetation maintenance may be required around sites.

Social Impacts

The social impacts of a designated NSP are minimal until there is use during an emergency.

Economic Impacts

No economic impacts are expected as a result NSP's being designated and meeting the mandatory assessment criteria.

Risk Assessment

In meeting the criteria for ongoing designation as an NSP, each year a risk assessment is carried out by Council, CFA and Victoria Police representatives to ensure designated NSP's still meet relevant criteria.

In 2023 updated signage has been installed in consultation with CFA to improve accessibility, this has been commended by CFA as an innovative addition to the Yarra Ranges NSP sites.

Complacent and uninformed residents and visitors to the Yarra Ranges may not understand the intent of NSP's. NSP's are a place of last resort and do not replace the need for residents to have a bushfire plan. Travelling to an NSP may be dangerous because of traffic congestion, fire activity, heavy smoke, accidents or fallen trees blocking the route. Community education campaigns and information for visitors to the Yarra Ranges must provide consistent key messages to highlight the role of NSP's. The CFA, fire agencies and Council will continue to promote consistent messages to this affect.

CONCLUSION

All Neighbourhood Safer Places and Community Fire Refuges within Yarra Ranges have been reassessed and found to comply with the assessment guidelines. All designated locations will be available for use by the community during the 2023/2024 fire danger period.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Neighbourhood Safer Places or Places of Last Resort within Yarra Ranges Municipality