

NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES OR PLACES OF LAST RESORT ANNUAL REPORT

Report Author: Executive Officer 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 is seeking Council to endorse the designation of Bushfire Shelter options within the municipality of Yarra Ranges.

The annual audit has been completed for all identified Neighbourhood Safer Places – Bushfire Places of Last Resort (NSP_BPLR) in Yarra Ranges. Nineteen sites have been audited and are deemed compliant for designation as NSP-BPLR for the 2024/2025 fire danger period.

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

This fire season one additional NSP-BPLR site has been reinstated, the Seville Recreational Reserve, first oval, making 19 sites in total, and 3 CFR sites established for the 2024/2025 fire danger period.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council supports and endorses the designation of 19 Neighbourhood Safer Places – Bushfire Places of Last Resort for the 2024/2025 fire danger period as deemed under the Country Fire Authority Act 1958.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

There are no related Council decisions relevant to this item.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

Yarra Ranges municipality is known as one of the highest risk bushfire areas in Victoria. As part of a holistic bushfire community safety approach there are a number of identified locations across the municipality that are flagged as NSP-BPLR. This is in accordance with the Country Fire Authority Act, that Victorian Councils are to identify, designate, establish and maintain suitable sites as NSP-BPLR in their municipal districts. NSP BPLR are locations where the community can gather that may provide some protection from direct flame and heat in a bushfire, when all other personal bushfire plans have failed.

The CFA conducts an annual assessment of each NSP-BPLR in collaboration with Victoria Police and a Council representative, to ensure compliance with the assessment guidelines. NSP-BPLR is not intended to replace a personal bushfire survival plan. The CFA advises that there is no guarantee that people will not be injured or killed by fire or radiant heat when traveling to or sheltering at the NSP-BPLR. Following the introduction of NSP-BPLR legislation Yarra Ranges Council currently has 19 NSP-BPLR locations within the municipality, which they maintain.

In comparison, CFRs are operated and maintained by the state government and are buildings that are modified, or purpose built to protect from heat and embers. CFRs are only open if there is a serious enough threat of fire in the location area and are a last resort location. The Yarra Ranges municipality has 3 of the 5 existing CFRs in state.

Options considered

This is a legislative requirement under *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*.

Recommended option and justification

Council acknowledges the annual review of NSP-BPLR and endorses the designation of 19 NSP-BPLR sites within Yarra Ranges municipality for 2024/2025 fire danger period.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

There are minimal costs for annual inspections, installation and maintenance of signage and NSP-BPLR sites, the annual inspections ensure that sites comply with the assessment criteria. All sites are subject to ongoing maintenance and are part of operational budget.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

Connected and Healthy Communities

- Yarra Ranges Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP)
 - As a legislated under the Emergency Management Act 2013 this municipal-wide multi-agency plan, the MEMP, sets out local emergency management arrangements, of which an Annual Fire Readiness program is required. This report links to the MEMP through the Annual Fire Readiness program and its actions provide broadscale community safety options for at-risk bushfire locations.

RELEVANT LAW

Country Fire Authority Act 1958 – S50J

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

In meeting the criteria for ongoing designation as an NSP-BPLR, no economic impacts are expected as a result. The operational budget meets any requirements for maintenance and upkeep of all sites.

Social Implications

The social impacts of designated NSP-BPLR are minimal, until its use during an emergency. Should communities or visitors not have an appropriate bushfire survival plan on high-risk days, these sites offer a place of last resort location that provides a safer option to self-evacuate in the event of a bushfire.

Environmental Implications

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

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Country Fire Authority, Victoria Police, relevant landowners/managers, community and Yarra Ranges Council staff are consulted during the NSP-BPLR assessment process.

Council publishes these sites on the state Government gazette; the CFA website and Council website lists all designated bushfire shelter locations in Yarra Ranges, this list is updated annually. As part of community awareness and broader personal bushfire safety messaging CFA recommends that each household has a personal bushfire survival plan that seeks to only use NSP-BPLR as a last life-threatening option.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

In meeting the criteria for ongoing designation of NSP-BPLR, each year a risk assessment is carried out by the Council, Country Fire Authority and Victoria Police representatives to ensure that designated NSP=BPLR still meet relevant criteria.

Installation of updated signage continues in consultation with CFA to improve accessibility. This has been commended by CFA as an innovative approach.

RISK ASSESSMENT

All NSP-BPLR within Yarra Ranges have been reassessed. They have been found to comply with the assessment guidelines and will be available for use by the community for 2024/2025 fire danger period.

Ongoing Community education and information from all relevant fire agencies provide consistent key messages to highlight the role of NSP-BPLR. NSP-BPLR are places of last resort and do not replace the need for residents to have a bushfire survival plan.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Neighbourhood Safer Place - Bushfire Places of Last Resort (NSP-BPLR) within Yarra Ranges municipality.