

## **Four Eyre Peninsula Communities establish “Emergency Ready Committees”.**

The towns of Cummins, Port Neill, Coffin Bay and Lock are all located on the Eyre Peninsular approximately 6 hours west of Adelaide, South Australia. These small towns have their differences but share commonalities in that they are all small communities with limited Agencies that would be able to respond in an emergency. They are tight knit communities who decided that in the event of an emergency, they would take actions to respond to the disaster by drawing on the local people and resources.

Cummins was the first town to establish an Emergency Ready committee. In 2008 this ‘can do’ community had a presentation delivered by the CFS Community Engagement Officer to the Probus club. It became clear after this meeting that there was a level of uncertainty of what different members of the community would need to do in the case of a bushfire. Cummins has just 1 Police Officer, a hospital, a school and a number of CFS and SES volunteers. Realising that the few Agencies that were available locally would be on the frontline dealing with the disaster meant that the town would need to work to ensure the safety of town members during emergencies.

The CFS Community Engagement Officer then ran additional Bushfire Ready sessions, but these were poorly attended. From there it became apparent that what was needed was to get the major Stakeholders from the Community in the room to start the conversation.

The Cummins Emergency Ready Committee (CERC) is set up with two levels of ‘membership’. The core group is made up of members from CFS, SES, Police, Ambulance, the School, Hospital and the Council with an ‘outer group’ made up of local businesses, Community groups and other Agencies. All those in the outer group are welcomed to attend meetings, but for the core group their attendance is required.

The Cummins Emergency Ready Committee started with a bushfire focus but quickly extended their focus to cover all hazards. This focus is reviewed and improved on a regular basis and includes the following features:

- The Bowling Club was identified as the most suitable location in town to be opened in an emergency and an MOU was agreed upon to allow its usage if required
- After discussing emergency sirens and discovering that this was not effective, A-frames were designed to be placed on the roads in an emergency to communicate important messages to those travelling in the region.
- The hospital and the school have reviewed and improved their Emergency Response Plans to make them more succinct. They are also practiced regularly.
- A group of retired Community members known as ‘the Grey Brigade’ have been assigned a variety of roles to assist in an emergency. These roles include helping to escort young children relocating from the kindergarten to the school, sitting in the hospital offering comfort to inpatients and outpatients waiting to be seen by the nurse in the case of multiple injuries resulting from an emergency situation, putting out signage and provide traffic management around the Bowling Club to ensure safety and avoid congestion.



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Two years after the Cummins Emergency Ready Committee was established, a new policeman came to Tumby Bay. When talking with the Police Officer from Cummins, he told him of their Committee and recommended that Port Neill set up a similar committee. The Port Neill Emergency Ready Committee (Port NERC) was established in 2010 and through learning from the Cummins Committee's experience, were able to become well established in just a few years. The Coffin Bay Community established their Emergency Ready Committee (CBERC) three years later in 2013, encouraged by the success and learnings of the other two communities.

Some of the other key actions undertaken in these communities include:

- the purchase of generators to be used during power outages
- supply boxes stocked with food, water and other essentials to be distributed to key locations in an emergency
- information posters on the backs of public toilets and in rental properties so that tourists and people new to the area will know where the Bushfire Safer Places in town are in the event of a bushfire
- The establishment of the Coffin Bay Yacht Club as a Bushfire Last Resort Refuge, with traffic to be managed by the Coffin Bay 'Grey Brigade'.

These towns have shown that opportunities to create Communities prepared for emergencies don't require having access to large formal Agencies. Instead they can be done through collaboration and residents pitching in and taking on responsibilities where they can to improve the safety and resilience of others through drawing on local knowledge and resources.



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In 2018, the community of Lock established their own Emergency Ready Committee. With their first action to extend the Bushfire Safer Place Boundary to include the Sports Oval and Sporting Clubrooms. With the knowledge and experience of the other three towns Committees available to the Lock Committee, we are confident that they will also be



successful in having a positive impact on their township.



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