



KURRAJONG HEIGHTS RURAL FIRE BRIGADE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To: Kurralong Heights Community
From: Gary Jol, Brigade Captain
Re: Neighbourhood Groups Program
Date: July 2025

The 2019 Gospers Mountain Fire left an indelible memory on those of us living at the Heights as did all the previous major fires. We were again fortunate and maintained our record of never losing a house on the mountain to a bushfire.

We've also had major fires in 1976, 1979, 1994, 1997, 2001 and 2013. The last couple of years have been very wet, resulting in an enormous growth in fuel loads and limiting our ability to complete urgent hazard reduction burns. We are hoping conditions will be more favourable before the next fire season.

During Gospers Mountain Fire a number of people in the community created informal groups to stay in touch with each other and offer mutual support. They created WhatsApp or similar groups for communication and neighbours were able to help each other in lots of different material ways, as well as providing emotional support before and after the fire event.

Since 2019 we have studied the use of community group in other areas. Where these were implemented effectively there were usually some major benefits:

- People were safer and even where properties were lost in an area, lives were generally saved.
- Where people stayed and defended their properties, the properties were typically saved. The RFS were better informed and knew which houses were being defended and which had been evacuated. Safeguarding lives is our #1 priority.
- Pets and livestock were more likely to be properly looked after.

Just because a program has worked in one area, there is no guarantee that it will work in ours in the future. However, common sense dictates that the better prepared we are as a community the more likely we are to survive.

So your Brigade has decided to implement a program at the Heights to create small neighbourhood groups. This is how we think it will work:

- We want to start with people volunteering to help start a group in their area.
- We'll invite these people to a Groups Information Session at the Brigade shed where we can more fully explain the program and what is involved.
- These people will then contact their immediate neighbours and have a get together to discuss the concept, agree the boundaries of the group, and start an action plan. They'll also ask the group to nominate a Coordinator and a Deputy.
- Groups will typically be small, say 10 – 15 houses, or whatever suits the geography.
- The Action Plan will typically involve all the families in the group individually reviewing and updating their Bush Fire Survival Plans and then getting together again to discuss their plans and working out how they can all help each other.

- Some people will need help to prepare their place or, in the event of fire, evacuate themselves or their animals. Some people will want advice such as where to go and what to take. Others will want help working out how to stay and defend and what to do when the fire front passes over.

Once our groups are established, we expect to work closely keeping each other informed. The Brigade will work with Coordinators to keep them up to date with planned HR burns and other activities like our Annual Community Briefing and Open Day at the Fire Shed.

Our groups can help the Brigade gather information such as the presence of Standing Water Supplies on each of the properties in their group and also helping gather landowner permissions for Hazard Reduction Burns where the planned HR adjoins their properties.

We have prepared a FAQ which will hopefully answer some of your questions. It's on the website under Neighbourhood Groups: www.khrfs.org

If you'd like to attend one of our Group Information Sessions, please call or email one of your Community Engagement Officers:

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| • Jeremy Braithwaite | 0416 222 112 | kh.rfs.community@gmail.com |
| • Julie Braithwaite | 0405 354 576 | kh.rfs.community@gmail.com |

The first session will be held on Saturday July 19th at the fire shed at 10.00 a.m. The times of other sessions will be communicated directly to interested parties and will also be published on the website.

Hoping you can join this program and by working together we can all make living at the Heights safer for us all.

Best wishes



Gary Jol
Brigade Captain
Kurrajong Heights Rural Fire Brigade
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