

Wednesday 14 December, 2022
MEDIA RELEASE



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PEARL BEACH COMMUNITY SUPPORT CENTRE OPENED MEMORIAL HALL - SUNDAY 11TH December 2022

On Sunday 11th December Pearl Beach Progress Association opened its Community Support Centre at the Pearl Beach Community Memorial Hall. Following the terrible 2019 bushfires and the horrifying experiences of a number of isolated communities and with a grant of \$91,630 from the Australian Government's *Black Summer Bushfire Recovery* program, enabled the Pearl Beach Safety Advisory Group, a Sub-Committee of the Pearl Beach Progress Association led by Paul Toohey, with a number of local volunteers to design and erect an active bushfire protection system to make the community hall a much safer place to shelter from a bushfire, for residents and visitors unable to evacuate.

"Paul Toohey welcomed the guests to the morning, thanking the Federal Government for their generous grant which enabled the infrastructure installation. He emphasised this would not have been possible without his co-partner Ben Kearney and the support of several very special volunteers who gave of their time and expertise to bring the project to this point. He acknowledged Laura Sheed representing the National Emergency Management Agency, Simon Duff from Towards Tomorrow Energy and importantly that the Memorial Hall has been approved by the Central Coast Bushfire Management Committee and the RFS as a 'Neighbourhood Safer Place'

He explained that over bushfire sprinkler system project includes 50 sprinklers installed on the Hall roof and walls to protect the hall from embers and fire, fed from two large steel rainwater tanks installed in the rear yard and a spear point pump for additional water in an emergency. Solar power with battery storage and a backup generator were also installed to make sure there was reliable power for the bushfire pumps and for the Hall to continue operation during emergency events including blackouts. Pending resolution of Water Access Licence issues with the NSW Government, a fire hose outlet on the tanks will be able to supply the RFS with enough water to refill up to 20 fire trucks over 24 hours.

The Pearl Beach Safety Advisory Group implemented the vision of a Community Support Centre several years ago by the Pearl Beach Safety Advisory Group and in particular by Greg McPhee, Carolyn Everett and Richard Stewart".

Karina Stafford, President of the Pearl Beach Progress Association, continued, 'whilst all of us in Pearl Beach love the beauty & tranquillity the surrounding bush and national parks provide, we are also very conscious of how quickly fires can spread through this area and the devastation they can cause to lives and property. One in five homes here adjoin national parks with two out of three properties now classified as bushfire prone, making it an area of particularly high risk.

More than 50% of our population are over 65 years of age, with a quarter over 75. One third of the homes have someone living by themselves, and 7% of the population require assistance for everyday tasks. This centre represents a place where all the community, particularly the vulnerable, have a place they can go in an emergency - a safer place, where others will be there to help them and provide comfort and support during emergency situations.

Congratulations to the Pearl Beach Safety Advisory Group on the opening of the Community Support Centre. This dedicated team has turned a concept into a reality and provided a much-needed resource for the community. We thank them for their vision, tenacity and hard work in securing funding for, and creating this Safer Place for Pearl Beach residents & visitors'. End:

Further information – Paul Toohey, 9412 254 979

Photos, taken by Duncan Bridel from Sundays opening.

Left to right – Photo with generator, Simon Duff (Towards Tomorrow Energy), Paul Toohey (PBSAG), Laura Sheed (National Emergency Management Agency) and Ben Kearney (PBSAG)
Photo of local guests.

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