

Media Release

Monday 22nd April 2024

Neighbourhood Safer Place Pearl Beach Memorial Community Hall

The Pearl Beach Progress Association (PBPA) in 2022 was fortunate to receive \$91K funding from the Australian Government's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery grants to upgrade our Memorial Community Hall (Hall) with substantial bushfire resilience measures to offer our community a place of refuge with significantly improved safety compared to retreating to the current unsheltered beach location in the event of a major bushfire.

With the implementation and installation of active bushfire protection sprinklers to protect the Hall buildings, independent water supply with 18kl steel rainwater tanks and due to delays recently installed a spearpoint pump giving extended operating time for sprinklers and additional water to supply RFS trucks. Also a backup power supply with solar, batteries and generator giving highly reliable supply for 48+ hours, Central Coast Bushfire Management Committee and NSW Rural Fire Service approved the Hall as a Neighbourhood Safer Place. The Hall infrastructure includes an AED, first aid supplies, toilet washroom facilities, NBN/phone and a functioning kitchen.

The PBPA's Hall project has successfully created a substantially more resilient "last resort" place for residents to shelter if unable to evacuate from a major fire. The Hall will also be an excellent resource in other catastrophic events such as major storms, road closures and power outages within the village. The Hall project was designed, project managed and installed by community volunteers.

The Hall / Neighbourhood Safety Place is also available for use by all NSW Emergency Services as a hub during a fire or storm when power is out in the village. NSP Operations Manual is in place and physical training in the activation and operation of the NSP commenced in March 2023.



Further training to refresh and of new operators, and familiarisation for residents, will be held each year in September ahead of the start of bushfire season. The hall bushfire safety sprinkler systems provide a safe haven for residents trapped in Pearl Beach by a fire, which is likely to cut the road and power for hours. We hope we won't have to use it, but if and when we do it will save lives.

Pearl Beach Overview - located in the Central Coast Council (LGS Category 2) is at high risk from both bushfire and severe storms emanating from the effects of climate change. In particular:

- * Pearl Beach is surrounded by the Brisbane Water National Park on ridges hemming the village on three sides, and up to 4km of dense bush. Fires in this area are an ever-present risk.
- * Around 120 of the 660 properties in the village directly abut the National Park and all are within 500m of the bush. Many people in these properties may need to be evacuated. The village is heavily vegetated and vulnerable to prolonged ember attack.
- * The village is served by a single 2km road surrounded by dense bushland on either side. The risks of this road being cut off are as follows:

- fire or fallen trees, isolating the village for hours or in catastrophic event possibly days.
- single overhead powerline could be out for hours or days.
- many residents are elderly/frail some requiring medical equipment or medicines which need refrigeration.

The Hall / Neighbourhood Safer Place will primarily ensure the survival and refuge of not only the Pearl Beach community/residents but also to the significant number of holiday makers and visitors to Pearl Beach.

End: Paul Toohey, Project Co-ordinator

photo: Ben Kearney, Paul Toohey & Warren Geenway- the job is completed !

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