



On the plan to build a new Fire Control Headquarters in the Hawkesbury

Description



Recently at our last Council meeting for 2019, Hawkesbury Mayor Barry Calvert moved [a Mayoral Minute](#) to seize on the high profile of bushfires in the Hawkesbury.

In it, he advocated for Hawkesbury to build a new purpose-built Fire Control Headquarters, to replace the current facility at Wilberforce.

I know Fire Control well, having volunteered there for some years in my teens and twenties, under the then Fire Control Officer, Bill Rodger. Situated in the old Colo Shire Council chambers building, it was an ageing, awkward and pokey fit even a quarter century ago. Colo Shire Council was founded in 1906 and amalgamated into the Hawkesbury Shire Council in 1981.

At times of emergency, the place just isn't big enough. Temporary structures have to be built outside, necessitating much to-and-fro.

The Mayor's Minute was endorsed, unanimously. However, the way in which it was presented strikes me as worth further comment.

I think most people supporting such a move appreciate the sentiment behind it first, but then expect it to outlay concrete steps that lead to the desired outcome. A new, purpose built facility is a massive expenditure. Ground was broken in September for a [new facility on the South West Slopes](#) and that will cost \$6.3 Million.

The Mayor's motion contained no financial commitment to either build, or even scope the ideal location and configuration of a new Fire Control Centre — both pre-requisite in my opinion to the State government signing on for funding.

In other words, Council needs to budget money to build our case. There's little point in "initiating discussions" (as the motion says) to ask for such a significant financial commitment. Wilberforce may not even be the best location for a new facility — some addressing the meeting nominated a number of alternatives.

This kind of wishlisting, without appreciating proper process or budgetary considerations, has happened before. As if smelling the wind, one Councillor added a clause to the motion to insist that the Wilberforce Brigade (who are co-located with Fire Control) be "fast tracked" to a new facility "within twelve months". In my opinion, this offers false hope, when Council's budget for the year has been locked in.

Michael Scholz, Captain of the Wilberforce Rural Fire Brigade addressed us and described the inadequacy of the current facility. No one disagreed. But the process of building a new fire shed involves forward planning and budgeting, and a lot of consultation. It can't be done by fiat on the spur of the moment. Two fire shed renovations in the Hawkesbury were held up for several years by spurious Native Title claims.

Our RFS locally have and continue to do a heroic job. There's definitely a case for a new Fire Control Centre. However, we have to now take concrete action: to budget, to scope our plan, to make a compelling case, and to commit to co-funding the facility. In my opinion, only then will our State Government take us seriously.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

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2. Resilience NSW
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5. Fire Control
6. Hawkesbury Fires
7. RFS
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