



Lowveld & Escarpment Fire Protection Association Newsletter

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## Greetings,

Unbelievably, it's a year since LEFPA opened the revamped crew room for the pilots at Nelspruit Airfield. Apparently time flies when we're having fun but firefighting isn't fun at all - it's a hot, adrenaline-fuelled, dangerous, exhausting slog and we are only too pleased to be able to offer the pilots, at least, a decent place to rest between calls. Are you diligently following the monthly Things to Do list? If not, why not? Weather conditions and misfortune can't be helped but preparation is a critical part of prevention. Until next time.

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## Introducing the New LEFPA Board

A record-breaking attendance by members requiring additional chairs to seat everyone at last month's AGM saw the election of the 2019 - 2022 Board and Executive Members. The outgoing Chairman Duncan Ballantyne opened the meeting and confirmed that the quorum required by the LEFPA NPC MOI was present.

Thanking staff, service providers and members, Duncan had a special word of appreciation for the outgoing board who have served the association over the past three years. LEFPA Secretary Mark Wagner then presented the BVK audited financials and reiterated the resolutions taken at a previous AGM of the 'caller pays' principal and the Debtors Protocol adopted by the association: outstanding accounts will be handed over for collection and interest charged. As an NPC, LEFPA cannot afford to incur huge sums of interest on outstanding accounts. Manager Andre Scheepers summed it up in his inimical way as "your airtime and data will be suspended"!

With over 60% of the LEFPA hectares attending the AGM it was an excellent time to propose and pass a resolution to change the structure of the Board from 12 to 13 members and to change the Executive Committee from 6 to 7 members. Another first was to welcome two ladies onto the Board. The new board members are:

Vaughan Lascelles (Chairman) representing MTO  
Jacques Schoeman (Vice Chair) representing Agriculture  
Mark Wagner (Secretary) representing SAPPI  
Ferdinand de Wet representing York Timbers  
Duncan Ballantyne representing Conservation  
Willem Van Wyk representing Residential  
Andre Scheepers  
Kobus Erasmus representing SAPPI  
Piet Bezuidenhout representing KLF  
Ilse Botman representing KLF  
Neil Engelbrecht representing Forestry Small Growers  
Thembile Dlungwana representing DAFF



A crowded, but productive, boardroom

Thereafter, the Board elected the seven Executive members who are: Vaughan Lascelles, Jacques Schoeman, Mark Wagner, Willem van Wyk, Duncan Ballantyne, Ferdie de Wet and Andre Scheepers. The sterling work Mark Wagner has done over the past three years saw him re-elected Secretary. Incoming Chairman Vaughan Lascelles writes:

*The board elected carries a wealth of experience and represents agriculture, forestry, conservation and residential. This board will serve all stakeholders over the next three years and together with the support from all members, undertake to serve its committed members and the community at large to the best of their ability. I appeal to all members to support the board in all their endeavours to ensure a fire-free and safe environment for land owners. I believe...through cooperation we will ensure that the Lowveld remains free of the devastating fires that gripped communities in other parts of the country and the world.*

All Fired Up wishes the new Board and Executive Committee everything of the best for their term of office; thank you for giving LEFPA your time and skills. A special word of appreciation and gratitude is extended to Duncan Ballantyne for his decade of service as Chairman.

## Highlights from the CSIR Report into the Knysna Fires

It's official - the recently released CSIR report into the 2017 Knysna fires has declared them to be the worst wildfire disaster in South African history. Small comfort to those affected by the fires but a huge alarm bell for the rest of us - wildfires are getting bigger, hotter and more frequent and are no longer 'unfortunate occurrences' but a fact of life to be prepared for and to guard against. As we now know, the Garden Route fires in 2018 were far bigger than the 2017 fires.

The report found that the event's severity was due to a mixture of factors, predominantly weather conditions and abundant fuel.

Key to the independently commissioned report are the recommendations and to be frank, LEFPA talks about many of them over and over at every opportunity. It's good to know that LEFPA's proactive approach and practical vision is endorsed by the CSIR.

So, what main points were included amongst the findings and recommendations?

- **Managing** or controlling the presence of fire-prone vegetation or **fuel loads**,
- **Attend to all fire callouts**, no matter how small or insignificant they appear,
- **Public education and awareness** programmes on wildfire risks,
- Better management by government to control fuel loads on municipal land especially along wildland-urban-interfaces,
- Communities to join the local Fire Protection Association and to participate in setting up **Fire-Wise** communities.
- Residents and landowners should work together with FPAs to map and monitor invasive alien plant regrowth accurately. The extent and density of AIPs is fundamental to calculating funding required to control the enormous regenerations of AIPs after fires,
- Gaps in wildfire suppression training, incident command and evacuation and response planning played a critical role in the fires remaining out of control for so long. LEFPA offers training and is always willing to teach communities and members - make use of this facility,
- The insurance industry should play a role in building the capacity of municipal fire services to deal with wildfire prevention and response. The industry could help by requiring policy-holders to take risk-reduction measures and is urged to extend insurance cover for the execution of preventative measures such as prescribed burning.
- The authorities are requested to strengthen the FDI component of the national fire danger rating system, to increase their capacity to respond to wildfires and to plan post-fire environmental recovery and rehabilitation. This is a point usually overlooked. Homes, businesses and people are obviously the primary concern after a catastrophe but the flush of invigorated fuel load growth places the opportunity for a repeat firmly on the table.



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The Knysna-Plett Herald ran an excellent article in June: [https://www.knysnaplettherald.com/News/Article/General/knysna-fire-independent-disaster-report-released-201906060101?fbclid=IwAR2N2z8UVCwW3AYfSocFR62YjBp2YKRI\\_oGYfn3FZ6ksv8OGUO2fBt5HJDg](https://www.knysnaplettherald.com/News/Article/General/knysna-fire-independent-disaster-report-released-201906060101?fbclid=IwAR2N2z8UVCwW3AYfSocFR62YjBp2YKRI_oGYfn3FZ6ksv8OGUO2fBt5HJDg)

The full CSIR report can be found on this link: <https://cms.groupereditors.com/Documents/FroalaFiles/ecaa6571-2b64-4489-b809-2daaf81e1cad.pdf>

## Ladybird, Ladybird...

'Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home. Your house is on fire and your children have flown'. The nursery rhyme recently came to horrifying life for a family in Phola Park, Sabie, when a fire ran amok through the shacks, causing injury and reducing everything they owned to ashes. Fortunately for this family their compassionate employer, Sabie Spar, called on the community for assistance which was generously given.

Every year when the weather cools, desperate people literally play with fire for heating and cooking. Here's a preventative safety checklist to share with your staff and colleagues.



- Candles, matches, lighters can be dangerous - handle with care and responsibly,
- Never cook near flammable materials,
- Place burning candles in safe, non-combustible containers away from flammable materials while lit,
- Be aware of the dangers of illegal and unsafe electrical connections,
- Extinguish cigarettes completely,
- Keep a bucket filled with water handy to quickly extinguish a fire as soon as it starts,
- Keep a bucket filled with sand handy to extinguish paraffin-fuelled fires. DO NOT USE water on a paraffin fire, it will spread,
- Build dwellings 3 metres apart and keep the empty space clean and clear,
- Keep roads and access space clear at all times to give emergency services unobstructed access,
- In the event of a fire, don't block the roads with your rescued possessions,
- Give the emergency services space to work, do not hinder them,
- Extinguish all open fires before leaving them or going to bed,
- Ensure adequate ventilation when cooking inside,
- Be especially careful when cooking with gas. Cylinders must be in good condition and tested regularly for leaks,
- Keep a close eye on paraffin stoves, make sure stoves can't fall over. Don't cook near a window with a curtain,
- Teach children about the dangers of fire.

## Thrusting Through the Skies - All About the Thrush Aircraft

Aerial fire suppression tends to focus on the dashing pilots but the aircraft are also stars and this month we begin a series featuring the Thrush aircraft. Aptly sharing its name with a bird, the Thrush aircraft is one of the most successful and long-lived agricultural aircraft types in the world; the factory has been in the same Georgia, USA, location since 1965. Vice-President of Sales at Thrush, Eric Rojek, quoted in Flying Magazines said: "Two things have significantly changed the industry in the last 30 years. The first is the domination of turbine-powered engines, which resulted in increased reliability and bigger hopper capacities. The second is GPS for application flow control, which produced many benefits: the ability to automatically turn the flow on and off at precise boundaries; have variable rate applications; and very precise invoicing with dates, times, and application rates. The GPS system will even adjust the flow as the ground speed changes on upwind and downwind passes over a field to maintain an even application."

Aviator readers will understand that this gives the pilot the freedom to concentrate on flying the plane. A precision GPS system means that once the desired spray path is entered into the system, the light bar on the instrument panel tells the pilot when he's over the centre line of the path.



An electronic system for fire operations allows a full-salvo dump to be programmed - either the full load in two seconds, a lengthened release or multiple partial releases. There is an infrared system available which can enhance forward visibility in poor conditions such as smoke. "It's a simple little ag airplane but the technology is really cool...Everyone is investing more and more in using new technologies to do a better job," Rojek adds. *To be continued next issue.*

## LEFPA Operational Centre Fire Season 2019

LEFPA is set to be a base station for the aerial 2019 fire season according to Bongani Sam Fakudze, after the dispatchers completed Type 2 Dispatch and Aeronautical Radio Telephony training.

Newly appointed LEFPA Dispatcher Bongani Sam Fakudze and Working on Fire's Pleasure Nkosi put themselves forward to become an integral part of Working on Fire's operations. They have proven themselves excellent 'desk pilots' ready to fly aircraft from the LEFPA dispatch office.

Their week's training at Bundu Lodge in Mbombela included daily dispatch procedures and the implementation of operational protocol. The duo enjoyed the training simulations of a live dispatch and were assessed on both their performances and open discussions about their respective Dispatch Centres.

The LEFPA Dispatch team also has the experienced Type 1 Dispatcher Louwrens Prinsloo on board, who emphasises the importance of working together to maintain work procedures and protocols in good shape. "They know I want a green DML, and I expect the team to be professional at all times, comfortable with their tasks, to stay up to date with changes in operational procedures and to be familiar with Radio communication", he says. A green DML is an up-to-date Dispatch Movement List, which means that all work is up-to-date and has been sent to the finance department. It's critical to be on top of everything in Dispatch as there is no time to play 'catch-up'. Louwrens is pleased with the progress seen to date in the Dispatch Centre and enjoys mentoring young people who strive to do their best.

Bongani Sam Fakudze says an ordinary day in Dispatch begins with the team contacting the pilots over the radio to confirm standby. "When all the pilots have responded that they are on duty, the day can start." Bongani enthuses.

Meanwhile, Pleasure enjoys the need to focus his attention, stay alert, remain calm and act decisively when there is the threat of a potential fire. "It is a new platform within a new environment offering new challenges but I take each day as it comes.



Every step I take is a learning experience and I work diligently to ensure proper protocols are maintained. Fire season, bring on all your lessons, I am ready for you", he concluded.

Thanks for the report, Bongani, *All Fired Up* looks forward to more articles from you.

(L-R) Desktop pilots Louwrens, Sam and Pleasure

### Activities for the Month - July

- Attend LEFPA meetings regularly.
- Check airstrips on a weekly basis.
- Ensure Eskom servitudes are burnt.
- Distribute your standby rosters to all neighbours.
- Advise all staff of call-out and dispatch protocols.
- Obtain FDI forecast on a daily basis from LEFPA.
- Complete the burning of your firebreaks as per your plan.
- Study weather systems and check forecasts on the internet.
- Perform daily and weekly checks of all equipment, using checklists.
- Perform checks to ensure readiness and quick reaction at all times.



#### Important Note:

- **CHANGE OF DATE:** the next General Meeting takes place at 9h00 on **25 July** LEFPA Boardroom.
- Please take part in our survey! [www.surveymonkey.com/r/GY8GDYZ](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GY8GDYZ).
- Basic Firefighting Training is available to LEFPA members. Interested parties can contact the LEFPA office.
- FDI weather emails and SMSs are available to LEFPA members, contact Ivina for more information.
- **SUCCESS cannot be spelt without U. Attend and participate - we need your contribution!**