



**NEIGHBOURHOOD  
CARE  
NETWORK Inc**

Being connected to stay safe

Bush Telegraph  
Policy and Procedures

V3

8 June 2023



# Bush Telegraph Policy and Procedures

## Contents

Background .....	3
Purpose of this Policy .....	4
Bush Telegraph Activation .....	4
Bush Telegraph alerts content .....	4
Alert information sources .....	5
Targeted Alerts .....	6
Risk Triggers .....	6
Gathering Local Knowledge .....	6
Exclusions .....	6
Bush Telegraph Coordination .....	7
Bush Telegraph Management Roster .....	7
Bush Telegraph Contact Lists .....	8
Activating a Bush Telegraph Alert .....	8
Drafting an Alert .....	9
Bush Telegraph Business Card .....	9
Bush Telegraph Business Process Maps .....	10
Official Sources Direct Request Bush Telegraph Alert Process Map .....	11
Verified Local Sources Bush Telegraph Alert Request Process Map .....	12



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## Background

The Neighbourhood Care Network Inc (NCN) is an independent incorporated association of people from the Bellingen Shire and surrounding areas.

The purpose of the NCN is to help residents to strengthen community wellbeing and prepare for and recover from disasters and severe weather events by:

- supporting new and existing Local Neighbourhood Groups to:
  - make sure people understand local risks.
  - have access to reliable information so that they can make informed decisions.
  - communicate with each other to make sure all residents have reliable and timely information, including when power and communication services are out
  - know who to contact if they need or can offer help; and
  - build local social connections that strengthen wellbeing and resilience.
- sending reliable and timely information about severe weather and local incidents to our members, through the Bush Telegraph alert service via SMS and the Signal App;
- working closely with key agencies and stakeholders to help groups get the resources and support they need for local initiatives, including disaster preparedness and recovery; and
- creating a community of practice which provides mutual support for ongoing local initiatives.

The NCN is made up of individuals who register with the network and neighbourhood groups of varying size across the Bellingen Shire and surrounding areas. Each group is lightly supported by volunteer coordinators.

The NCN has a small secretariat known as the NCN Hub Team to support the organisation of groups, support local group communication planning and asset mapping, link groups to the resources that they need and disseminate reliable information from trusted sources.



# Bush Telegraph Policy

## Purpose of this Policy

This policy outlines the purpose and scope of the Bush Telegraph Alert Service.

The purpose of this service is to provide residents of the Bellingen Shire and surrounding area with trusted, timely, reliable information about local critical incidents so that residents can make informed decisions about how to prepare, respond and recover.

## Bush Telegraph Activation

The Bush Telegraph seeks to avoid duplicating readily available information and contributing to community information overload and confusion.

The Bush Telegraph only disseminates information that is readily available to the community from official sources when there is a high level of risk. This is because many Bush Telegraph subscribers are vulnerable and/or isolated and do not receive information via emergency apps and other official channels.

The Bush Telegraph is only activated when:

1. Agencies such as the State Emergency Service (SES), NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), Bellingen Shire Council and the Community Resilience Network (CRN) have asked for specific information to be disseminated including in relation to preparedness, response and recovery; or
2. There is a sufficient level of risk to alert the community to emerging events.

## Bush Telegraph alerts content

The alerts will provide information about:

- severe weather events
- flooding
- bushfires
- unplanned significant road and bridge closures
- land slips



- major accidents with widespread impacts
- pandemics
- and other local emergencies.

## Alert information sources

The Bush Telegraph only disseminates information that is reliable, verifiable and from trusted sources.

### *Official information*

Wherever possible, the Bush Telegraph disseminates information released by key agencies such as the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), the SES, the RFS, Bellingen Shire Council, NSW Health and the NSW Reconstruction Authority to ensure consistent information is available across the community.

The Bellingen Shire Disaster Dashboard is a key source of local, official information. The Bellingeweather.org website which draws on the BOM, and other weather models is also a key source of local weather information.

The Bush Telegraph works closely with the Bellingen Shire Community Resilience Network (CRN) and the Local Emergency Management Officer to disseminate information generated by the Local Emergency Management Committee and the CRN.

### *Local information*

Sometimes key agencies don't have immediate access to important information about emerging local situations. For example, the BOM doesn't monitor some specific catchments which can lead to flooding in key areas.

For this reason, the Bush Telegraph disseminates information from trusted, verifiable local sources such as the Weather Watch Initiative, Neighbourhood Care Network Coordinators and other confirmed local sources.

Information posted to social media by trusted sources, such as Bellingen Shire Council, will also be used when relevant.

Information from social media that cannot be independently verified will NOT be used.



## Targeted Alerts

Critical information relevant to the entire region will be sent to all Bush Telegraph subscribers.

Local information will be sent to NCN members in specific areas.

## Risk Triggers

- A request is received from a local agency.
- Watch and Act or Emergency Warning alerts have been issued that directly impact on the Bellingen Shire or surrounding areas.
- High Fire Danger rating
- Reporting through the Weather Watch initiative indicates significant local rainfall likely to cause local flooding and bridge closures, and this is not being monitored or reported by the BOM.
- A very local hazard causes safety issues for residents e.g., land slip, blocked road, severe storms
- Tsunami alerts

## Gathering Local Knowledge

The NCN may use the Bush Telegraph as a tool to seek out information on the practical impacts of disasters and serious incidents. This information will inform the work of the CRN, the Local Disaster Recovery Committee and other agencies who request it.

## Exclusions

### **Bush Telegraph alerts will not be used to:**

- Pass on information that is ONLY verifiable via social media.
- Promote services unless directly related to specific preparedness or recovery event.
- Promote commercial or community activities, apart from the annual NCN community fundraising campaign.



- Promote the activities of the NCN, apart from disaster preparedness and recovery events or to provide a link to the website for registration purposes.
- Promote the activities of any other agency.
- Seek information or help from network members for specific activities or needs.

The Bush Telegraph may be used for direct communication with NCN members on NCN activities. This will include, but not be limited to, the Skills Register, mobilising NCN members who have offered to help in preparedness and recovery efforts, provide billets etc and contact with NCN Coordinators.

## Bush Telegraph Operating Procedures

The Bush Telegraph is managed by the NCN Hub Team and when necessary, staffed by trained NCN volunteers.

### Bush Telegraph Coordination

- The Bush Telegraph is managed on a voluntary basis via an on-call roster of members of the NCN Hub Team.
- A dedicated mobile phone is the central point of contact for local services and accredited local contacts for initiating a Bush Telegraph alert.
- The Bush Telegraph phone number is 0413 277 603
- This is the primary point of contact for local agencies and individuals to activate a Bush Telegraph alert.
- The personal mobile numbers of the NCN Hub Team are the backup numbers if needed. These are: Kerry Pearse – 0411 671 673, Ian Gilmore – 0408 677 971, Jane Grant – 0411 512 801.

### Bush Telegraph Management Roster

- If the Bush Telegraph mobile isn't answered agencies should contact the NCN Hub Team members on their personal mobiles. This is most likely if the Team has stood down between events.



- The NCN Hub Team will be stood up and the Bush Telegraph mobile monitored 24/7 as soon as an event is emerging. The Project Lead and Project Support officers will be on a daily roster to manage the dedicated mobile phone and activate an alert if required.
- The NCN Operations Manager is on call to generate current contact lists for specific locations as required, based on a bespoke mapping system informed by the NCN membership database and QGIS. The other NCN Hub Team members are also trained in generating current contact lists from this system.
- In the lead up to events the Hub Team may choose to implement more frequent rotation of the Bush Telegraph on-call roster.
  - The NCN Hub Team will be responsible for Bush Telegraph alerts if an event is short.
  - If it is likely that an event will be ongoing (i.e., more than 7 days), the Bush Telegraph will be formally stood up and a roster with trained Bush Telegraph volunteers will be implemented. The roster will be managed by a nominated member of the NCN Hub Team.

## Bush Telegraph Contact Lists

- The Bush Telegraph contact lists are managed by the Neighbourhood Care Network Customer Relationship Management database (CRM).
- A new contact list is generated for each Bush Telegraph activation event to ensure that the list is current.
- Contact lists for locally specific alerts are generated using purpose designed maps informed by the NCN CRM.
- The NCN Hub Team are trained in creating Bush Telegraph alert contact lists.
- For ongoing events Bush Telegraph alert contact lists will be established and updated on a daily basis.

## Activating a Bush Telegraph Alert

- The on call NCN Hub Team member will decide if a Bush Telegraph alert will be activated, based consideration of the triggers and risks outlined in the Bush Telegraph Policy.
- It is likely that NCN Hub Team members will need to rely on their judgement when activating an alert that isn't directly requested by a local agency. NCN





hub Team members will consult with each other to determine activation when the level of risk or need is unclear.

## Drafting an Alert

- Alerts should be very brief, in very plain English and clear.
- Inclusive language should be used.
- Wherever possible information should be referenced to official sources via a Tiny URL link.
- When an alert is from a verified local source, the source should be referenced. E.g., Bellingen SES, NCN Coordinator etc.
- The alert will be shared to the NCN Facebook Page once sent.

*These guidelines are a living document and continually updated to incorporate lessons learned and changes in the operating environment.*

## Bush Telegraph Business Card

A business card sized version of this information is circulated to local agencies for easy reference.



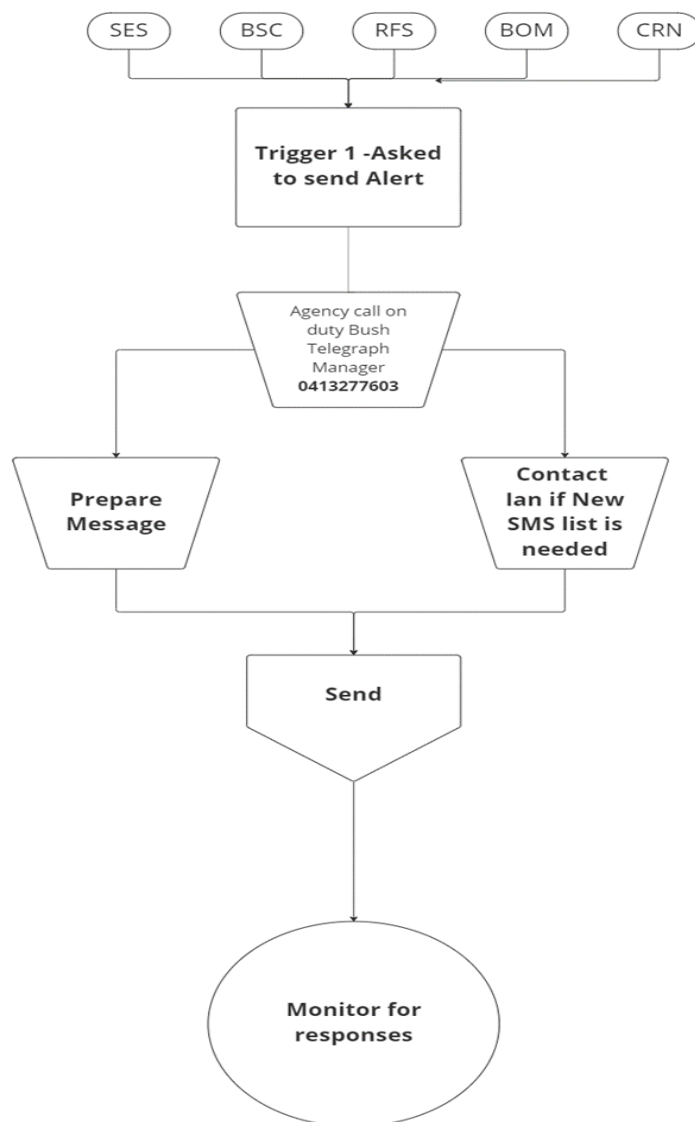


## Bush Telegraph Business Process Maps



## Official Sources Direct Request Bush Telegraph Alert Process Map

### NCN Bush Telegraph Direct request Business Process





## Verified Local Sources Bush Telegraph Alert Request Process Map

