



State Fire Management Council

State Vegetation Fire Management Policy 2012

1. Introduction

The State Fire Management Council (SFMC) is established under Section 14 of the *Fire Service Act 1979* (Tasmania). A principal function of the Council is to develop a State vegetation fire management policy (*Fire Service Act 1979* S. 15 (a)).

SFMC has an independent chair and members are appointed to represent the following organisations:

- Forest Industry Association of Tasmania;
- Forestry Tasmania;
- Local Government Association of Tasmania;
- Parks and Wildlife Service;
- Tasmania Fire Service, and
- Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association.

The actions and strategies outlined in this policy reflect the need to balance the often competing demands to protect life and assets, natural and cultural values and to maintain community support for fire management practices. In developing the policy SFMC has taken into account the broader context of:

- The benefits of fire as a land management tool for protecting life and property and for maintaining natural values, and as an accepted practice for control of disease, hazard reduction and vegetation;
- The increasing prevalence of bushfires due to changes in climatic conditions and the increasing trend of people building and living in bushfire prone areas;
- The need to establish community level priorities for action;
- The changes in land use patterns which have increased the number of people living in highly vegetated areas of the State as well as the establishment of new groups of stakeholders;
- The diverse range of community attitudes towards fire and its role in the landscape.
- The need to engage local communities and individuals in fire prevention and management in the face of limited resources, acknowledging the need to build community resilience to bushfires;
- The need to adopt a planned approach to make the best use of available resources to meet future challenges, and
- The development of risk based land use planning principles.

2. Purpose of the Policy

To provide a standard and consistent framework for the management of vegetation fire across all land tenures and vegetation types in Tasmania in order to produce the following outcomes:

- Save lives;
- Minimise risks to assets;
- Protect natural and cultural heritage values;
- Increase community capacity and resilience;
- Maximise the level of community engagement and understanding of vegetation fire prevention and management, and
- Encourage the responsible use of fire for the management of land and agricultural systems.

3. Status and use of the Policy

This policy represents the position of the State Fire Management Council. The policy is provided for the information of and use by the community through the Minister responsible for the *Fire Service Act 1979*. By agreement, SFMC member bodies should comply with the policy as far as reasonably possible.

The policy applies to both planned use of fire as well as unplanned or wildfire management across Tasmania. It therefore encompasses the urban, agricultural and natural vegetation areas of the State.

This policy can be used as a framework for planning and action by a diverse range of stakeholders across the State responsible for fire and vegetation management activities including but not limited to:

- Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment;
- Forestry Tasmania;
- Tasmania Fire Service;
- Local Government;
- Private forestry companies;
- Farmers and graziers;
- Landholders and managers;
- Community groups, and
- External funding providers (e.g. the Caring for Country or Bushfire Mitigation Fund programs).

This policy can only apply to the extent provided by legislation and other policies and arrangements.

4. Principles that underpin the Policy

In principle vegetation fire management practices should comply with Australian standards and best practice. Additionally there is a need to draw upon the most up to date scientific data to formulate options for appropriate responses. However there is also a requirement for high level principles. The Council of Australian Governments has endorsed the Recommendations of the *National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management (2004)*ⁱ. Recommendation 14.1 proposes a set of Indicative National Bushfire Principlesⁱⁱ which are to be used as the basis for national consultation and adoption. SFMC has adopted the Indicative National Bushfire Principles to underpin this policy, noting that within the Ellis et al. (2004) report planned fires as well as unplanned bushfires were included in the National Bushfire Principles.

The Indicative National Bushfire Principles are:

Bushfires are understood, accepted and respected

Like other natural hazards, bushfires cannot be prevented. In many instances, bushfires are an important tool to assist in achieving land management objectives. The impact of unplanned fires needs to be minimised through effective action based on learning and understanding. This also requires strong self-reliance.

Shared responsibility

A philosophy of responsibility shared between communities and fire agencies underlies our approach to bushfire mitigation and management. Well-informed individuals and communities, with suitable levels of preparedness, complement the roles of fire agencies and offer the best way of minimising bushfire risks to lives, property and environmental assets.

Decisions within a risk management framework

No single action will lead to the elimination of bushfire risk. The best approach to minimising risk is to make decisions about bushfire mitigation and management within an integrated risk management framework.

Integration of learning and knowledge

Analysis of fire events is based on operational and scientific evidence and research. This should be informed by extensive and consistent national data, including fire regime mapping. The best results will be achieved by integrating all forms of knowledge, and good information about fire history, with analysis at the local and regional levels.

Manage fire according to the landscape objectives

Australia has a great diversity of climates, environments, land uses and built assets. Fire management objectives and outcomes will vary across landscapes and over time. Clear agreed objectives and an adaptive management approach are required for implementation.

Consistency of purpose and unity of command

There needs to be consistency of purpose during bushfire mitigation and unity of command for all fire response, irrespective of organisational structures.

Protection of lives as the highest consideration

Firefighter and community safety must be at the forefront of bushfire mitigation and management deliberations. Although there should always be a balance between safety, effective response and environmental considerations, it is personal safety that must be the greatest concern.

Monitoring performance

The states, territories and local governments need to regularly review their performance against these principles and other appropriate indicators. Performance review should not be allowed to wait until after a major bushfire event. If the principles are to improve performance and bring about change, they must be monitored on a regular basis.

5. Action Areas and Strategies

The State Vegetation Fire Management Policy encourages the following actions by all stakeholder groups in the Tasmanian community. While some actions will be taken specifically by the State Fire Management Council and the bodies represented on the Council all stakeholder groups are encouraged to use the policy as a framework for their own approach to vegetation fire management.

Action area 5.1 Management of fire in vegetation

Strategies:

Common set of tools

Continue the development and adoption of a common set of tools and terms for fire management by all stakeholder groups as an essential component of effective management of vegetation fire across the State.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Ensure that terms and jargon are based on the AFAC Glossary in all documents, publications and training material.*
- *Continue inter-agency training and workshops to generate consistency of approach where possible.*
- *Continue use of AIIMS ICS for managing all vegetation fires.*
- *Develop and trial joint fire management tools and templates (eg Planned Burning Prescriptions, fuel hazard mapping).*
- *Develop common systems, standards, policies, procedures and guideline (e.g. radio communications networks, standard fire hose couplings, GIS mapping systems, Air Desk procedures, fire trails –specifications, keying, naming and signage)*

Integrated approach

Implement an integrated approach to fire management with all interested parties, especially in boundary areas or where the community impact will be substantial.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Continue the Inter-agency Fire Management Protocol*
- *Continue the Statewide Strategic Fuel Reduction Program.*
- *Use new and emerging research to inform the development of regional/district level fire management plans and to manage risk.*
- *Commit to integrated and cooperative planning across tenures at both the strategic (regional) and tactical (local) levels.*

- *Ensure regional and statewide risks are identified and prioritised, and agreed among the stakeholders.*

Give due consideration to the recommendations of the 2011 Auditor-General Special Report into Bushfire Managementⁱⁱⁱ

Use of zones

Promote the adoption of the fire management zones proposed in Ellis *et al.* (2004) and adopted by the Government of Tasmania and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as a minimum standard.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Develop zone definitions, objectives and mitigation criteria appropriate for all tenures.*
- *Broaden the use of zones on public lands to include private lands.*
- *Encourage the use of zones for fire management purposes by providing appropriate training materials.*

Land use planning and management practices

Encourage land use planning and management practices which minimise the potential for loss and damage as a result of unplanned vegetation fire and incorporate contemporary risk based land use planning principles.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Support the need for strong controls over development in bushfire prone areas.*
- *Provide support resources for the development community.*
- *Promote hazard reduction and other effective bushfire safety measures.*
- *Local government authorities and land management agencies should take a risk based approach to land use planning and the placement and management of assets in relation to flammable vegetation.*
- *Provide training on risk based land use planning.*

Fire as a tool to sustain natural values

Promote the use of fire as a means to sustain natural values and maintain biodiversity while appropriately managing fuel hazards.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Publicise examples of best practice fire management.*
- *Encourage community acceptance of the role of fire in maintaining landscapes and biodiversity.*
- *Promote the development of more cost effective ways of using fire as a hazard management tool.*
- *Continue promoting better knowledge of appropriate fire regimes for the management of Tasmanian vegetation.*

Balancing competing values

Emphasise the net benefits to the community of planned burning and other fuel management activities for the protection of natural values and the minimisation of losses.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Promote a risk management approach in decision making which includes both monetary and non monetary values as well as short and long term outcomes.*
- *Promote the understanding of the risks which may remain after mitigation activities.*
- *Promote acknowledgement that smoke may have impacts which need to be managed and in some situations cannot be avoided (e.g. short-term visual impacts, road closures).*
- *Develop systems for informing communities of potential impacts from smoke and minimising the impact on public events.*

Action area 5.2 Community awareness and engagement

Strategies

Engaging communities and building awareness and capacity

Facilitate community understanding and support of vegetation fire management practices.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Provide opportunities for community members to gain information about current knowledge and to become more aware of the range of fire management options.*
- *Promote access to a range of information resources.*
- *Ensure appropriate community engagement occurs throughout planning processes.*
- *Promote community capacity to manage their own fire risk.*
- *Promote the transformation of awareness into action at the individual, family and community level.*

Identify priorities at the regional or district level

Encourage communities to identify their priority assets and values to guide fire management strategies and actions.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Provide communities with the tools to conduct the priority and valuation assessment process.*

Empower and support Fire Management Area Committees

Provide resources to enable Fire Management Area Committees to more effectively engage with their communities.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Review the structure and operation of Fire Management Area Committees.*
- *Encourage Fire Management Area Committees to engage with relevant community groups and authorities.*
- *Promote public awareness of the role of Fire Management Area Committees.*

Action area 5.3 Building the knowledge base

Strategies

Identifying knowledge gaps

Identify priorities and opportunities for further fire research relevant to Tasmania.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Identify the fire research needs for Tasmania.*
- *Direct the funding priorities of the Tasmanian Fire Research Fund using identified research needs.*
- *Promote identified research priorities with bodies such as the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre.*
- *Work with the University of Tasmania to foster research in priority areas.*

Foster appropriate research and disseminate findings

Promote research findings in an accessible format to key stakeholder groups and the community.

Supporting actions may include:

- *Advocate the provision of resources to conduct research appropriate to Tasmania.*
- *Develop a communications plan for the transfer of knowledge.*
- *Promote access to and encourage adoption of authoritative and current research findings.*

6. Review period for the policy

The State Vegetation Fire Management Policy will be reviewed by the Council within two years.

ⁱ Ellis, S, Kanowski, P & Whelan, R. 2004. *National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. 451 pp. Commonly referred to as Ellis *et al.* (2004).

ⁱⁱ Ellis *et al.* (2004) Box 14.1 p. 240.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Auditor-General Special Report No. 99: Bushfire management*. Tasmanian Audit Office, Hobart, 2011.