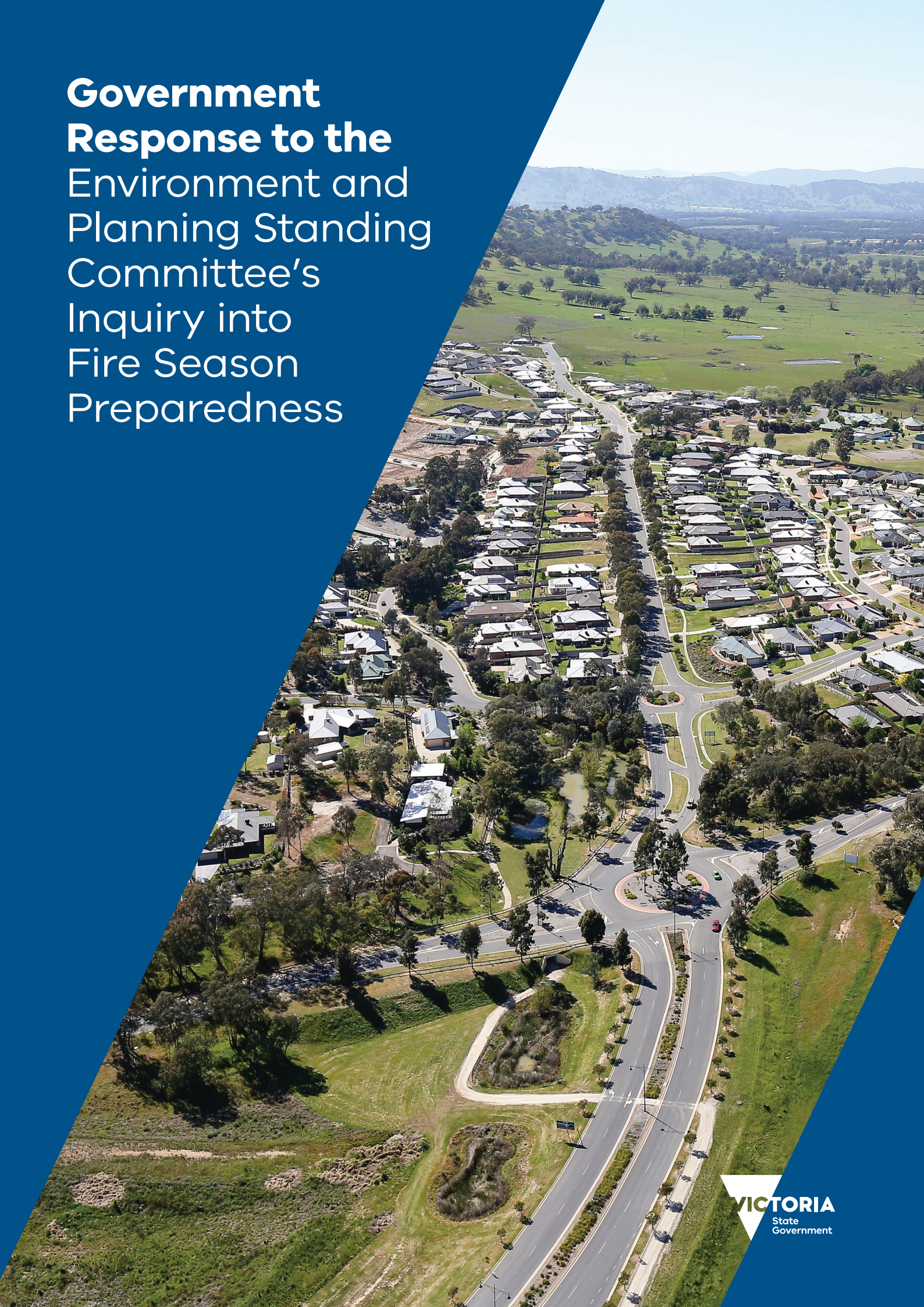


Government Response to the Environment and Planning Standing Committee's Inquiry into Fire Season Preparedness



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Foreword

The Andrews Labor Government thanks the Environment and Planning Committee, chaired by Hon David Davis MLC, for its inquiry into fire season preparedness.

Victoria's fire preparedness arrangements have been subject to significant review over the past five years, including the 2015 Inspector General for Emergency Management (IGEM) Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land. The Government welcomes the opportunity to further assess and refine its approach in this area.

We will act purposefully to implement *Safer Together – a new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria*, the Government's response to the IGEM Review, which replaced a fuel management hectare target with a risk-reduction performance target.

Safer Together combines world-leading science and technology with local knowledge and extensive community engagement, to help build safer communities, a thriving economy and a healthy environment. The Government has a significant work program ahead of it to fully realise *Safer Together*, and many of the Committee's recommendations are valuable additions to the work already underway to ensure our fire preparedness is as effective as possible.

All recommendations of the Committee have been carefully considered and the Government generally agrees that they will contribute to our efforts to minimise the risk and harm caused by bushfires. Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 9 are supported in principle; recommendations 6, 8, 10, 11 and 12 are supported in full, while recommendation 5 is not supported. An implementation plan will be developed to ensure that the commitments made in this response are delivered in a timely manner, and to help ensure communities throughout Victoria feel supported, included and safer as we work together against the threat of bushfire.

Victorians are acutely aware of the devastation that bushfires can cause, and it is essential that we continually strive to improve the ways in which we manage bushfire risk. This includes developing and applying new technology and practices, as well as drawing on the knowledge and experience of Traditional Owners.

The need to innovate and improve the way we manage bushfires is growing in an environment increasingly influenced by climate change, with associated increases in bushfire risk. This reinforces the need for an approach to fire preparedness which focuses on the effectiveness of fuel reduction as well as the range of other ways we manage bushfire risk, while protecting the values that are important to all Victorians.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lily D'Ambrosio'.

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

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Recommendation 1

The Government should:

- a. Provide additional support to the Gippsland Arson Prevention Program; and
- b. Support the establishment of arson prevention programs of this type in other bushfire-prone regions within Victoria, and involve both community and government agencies.

Response: Support in principle

Overview

Arson represents a significant proportion of bushfire ignitions each fire season. The Victorian Government is taking a holistic and strategic approach to arson prevention. Victoria Police (VicPol) leads the Government's approach in close partnership with fire agencies, local governments, and local communities.

What has been done

The Bushfire Arson Prevention Policy Statement (2015–2018) articulates an ongoing commitment to bushfire arson prevention activities through the identification of key strategic and operational activities. These activities are aligned with the strategic priorities set out in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) recommendations. The five priorities are:

1. Developing a better understanding of bushfire arson
2. Building effective cooperative partnerships and networks
3. Delivering a state-wide, coordinated, intelligence led response
4. Local arson prevention and detection strategies informed by best practice
5. Creating increased organisational capacity and capability

VicPol develops a range of internal and external communications regarding bushfire arson in the lead up to each bushfire season. This includes the coordination of an annual Bushfire Arson Community Awareness Campaign, conducted in partnership with Crime Stoppers, to encourage the public to report suspicious arson activity. This campaign is held in conjunction with the launch of Operation Firesetter and other key arson prevention communication activities, held during Fire Action Week each year.

Operation Firesetter is a dedicated and highly visible bushfire arson prevention and detection operation that is focused on: high-risk bushfire arson locations and time periods; crime prevention activities; and Person of Interest management and monitoring. The overall aim of Operation Firesetter is to reduce the occurrence and impact of suspicious (intentional or reckless) bushfire arson activity during the highest risk period, from the start of November to the end of April each year.

What will be done

VicPol will investigate the feasibility of the Extinguish Arson Intelligence Database (EAID)/ Arson Trend Analysis System (ATAS) to complement existing systems.

There will also be ongoing improvements to enhance the Country Fire Authority (CFA) & Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Bushfire Investigation Courses. These courses are multi-agency and provide specialist training to personnel from CFA, DELWP, Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), VicPol and Forensic Services in the technical aspects to determine the origin, cause, path and impact of bushfires.

Recommendation 2

The Government introduce an amendment to the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* or other instruments which imposes significant penalties and strengthens enforcement, including via infringement notices, for offences against total fire ban requirements before the 2017/18 fire season.

Response: Support in principle

Overview

Fires caused by human activity represent a substantial risk to the community. The Victorian Government agrees that effective offences and enforcement are required to deter and prevent behaviour that may result in fires at times of heightened risk, including on total fire ban days.

What has been done

The existing section 40 of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (CFA Act) establishes a statutory framework for total fire bans. This framework includes the power for the CFA to declare a total fire ban, an offence for activities that breach a total fire ban, and numerous exceptions to that offence including for certain activities undertaken in accordance with a permit. Section 40 also provides for an offence for breaching a permit to conduct specified activities on a total fire ban day, evidentiary provisions for establishing offences, and a defence for breaching a total fire ban declaration.

What will be done

These arrangements are complex, and have been subject to many incremental changes since they were first introduced. It is timely to review those arrangements as a whole.

The Government will review the framework in section 40 and related statutory provisions with a view to framing strong and effective offences to deter and punish those who breach total fire bans. This will include examining opportunities to enforce such offences using infringement notices, in a way that is consistent with the *Attorney-General's Guidelines to the Infringements Act 2006*.

By their nature, breaches of total fire bans can be difficult to detect as they can occur anywhere in Victoria on private or public land. The Government supports multi-agency arrangements to share intelligence to improve fire prevention and mitigation. The Government will examine options to further strengthen Victoria's operational arrangements to detect and enforce total fire ban offences.

The scope of this work means it is not realistic to implement this recommendation before the 2017/18 fire season. The Government will undertake this work at an early opportunity, in accordance with the usual arrangements for progressing its legislative program.

Recommendation 3

That Government provide support in the form of funding for the Return to the Firestick project, and that a formal pilot scheme be established where data can be collected, collated and analysed and the effectiveness of this approach be compared against current burning practices.

Response: Support in principle

Overview

The Victorian Government supports the use of cultural burning practices as part of the broader bushfire management program under *Safer Together*. Cultural burning strengthens the involvement of Aboriginal communities in land management. There is a shared aspiration among Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Victorians, land managers, emergency management agencies and private land holders to revitalise cultural burning in Victoria. Support for cultural burning also comes from other program initiatives, including through implementation of the CFA Koori Inclusion Action Plan (2014-2019).

What has been done

Engagement with Traditional Owners about cultural burning across Victoria reflects the unique and local specific nature of burning practices in response to the local environment.

Fire agencies are engaging at the local and regional levels with Traditional Owners to increase agencies' understanding of cultural burning practices.

There are examples of cultural burning practices across Victoria. The Dja Dja Wurrung traditional owner group, with support from DELWP, recently conducted a cultural burn on Dja Dja Wurrung country near Bendigo. The planning and delivery of this burn was led by a Dja Dja Wurrung fire planner currently employed by DELWP. Additionally, the Walpa Dyurrita cultural burn took place in May 2017 in partnership with Barengi Gadjin Land Council. The crew lighting the burn were Traditional Owner staff of DELWP and Parks Victoria, watched over by Wotjobaluk Elders.

The CFA has partnered with Traditional Owners in several projects aimed at bringing fire back to country and has directly supported awareness events and burns on private property and Aboriginal owned land.

What will be done

An Aboriginal Fire Strategy is being prepared by DELWP and the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations to build capacity for cultural burning practices under *Safer Together*. Ongoing engagement will provide more opportunities to enhance the use of cultural burning practices with local and regional groups.

Fire agencies will continue to develop systems and processes that will enable cultural burning to become business as usual. These improvements will capture the data on the cultural burning practices and support future evaluation of effectiveness.

Recommendation 4

That any such pilot program ought to be managed by the relevant Indigenous organisations, with support provided by DELWP and its partner agencies and the development and the evaluation of any pilot program should be overseen by an independent and reputable academic or research institution.

Response: Support in principle

Overview

The Victorian Government supports the use of cultural burning practices as part of the broader bushfire management program under *Safer Together* and other program initiatives. Cultural burning strengthens the involvement of Aboriginal communities in land management. There is a shared aspiration among Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Victorians, land managers, emergency management agencies and private land holders to revitalise cultural burning in Victoria.

What has been done

Ongoing research and monitoring forms an essential component of the fuel management programs conducted by fire agencies. Active relationships are in place with several research institutions including Monash University, La Trobe University and Deakin University.

What will be done

Monitoring, evaluation and review aspects will be included in the Aboriginal Fire Strategy currently being prepared and built into the DELWP Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) Program (for further information on the Aboriginal Fire Strategy, see Recommendation 3).

Recommendation 5

That in conjunction with a risk-based approach, a minimum hectare target is also maintained that can be measured and compared. This minimum target should not be below the 5% target established by the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission.

Response: Not support

Overview

Safer Together drives a more effective bushfire management risk reduction approach by using local knowledge and expertise. Local communities understand their local environment, and the fuel management actions of land and fire managers must be tailored to local needs. This means reducing not only the impact of bushfire on life and property, but on businesses, infrastructure, environmental and cultural values.

The Victorian Government accepted a recommendation of the 2015 IGEM Review of fuel management performance targets to adopt a risk reduction target as the most effective form of performance target for bushfire management on public land. *Safer Together* has underpinned the transition from a hectare target to a risk-based performance target. IGEM independently monitors and reports on the transition to a risk-based approach.

The Victorian Coroner's 2017 investigation into the Wye River – Jamieson Track fire determined that DELWP and its partner agencies' policies governing fuel management were appropriate. This includes the use of a risk-based approach to guide operational delivery of planned burns and prioritising burns to deliver the greatest risk reduction over time.

What has been done

Revised strategic bushfire management and fire operations frameworks have been developed in partnership across fire agencies and local councils to support a risk based approach. Continued investment in scientific and technical capacity has underpinned improved bushfire behaviour modelling, and in turn has enhanced the predictive tools for effective risk based approaches. Online delivery of these improved predictive tools is also being trialled.

Communications about fuel management activities are being delivered across a range of media channels. These communications seek to improve transparency and community awareness of fuel management activities. Community Based Bushfire Management process was undertaken for 12 priority locations in collaboration with fire agencies, local governments, and communities.

A new research project has been established with a research consortium of Victorian research organisations, University of Melbourne, Latrobe University and Arthur Rylah Institute, to describe the framework for how ecological risk assessment is applied and how new data is captured through research and monitoring is used to update and inform the ecological models used to underpin fuel management decision-making. This framework will consolidate several pieces of research and application of research outcomes about the ecosystem resilience metrics.

What will be done

Annual fuel management reports will continue to detail hectares planned and treated, together with residual risk. The development of an updated bushfire management planning framework across all land tenures also establishes a future path for planning to measure risk reduction across the wider bushfire management considerations of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Recommendation 6

That fire managers responsible for planned burns be indemnified against any and all actions in the event of damage caused by an escape of the planned burn, on the basis of a 'good faith' test.

Response: Support in full

Overview

The Victorian Government acknowledges that planned burns give rise to inherent risks that the burn may escape and impact life and property. There are rigorous standards, processes and authorisations in place to mitigate against these risks.

What has been done

There are existing immunities in place for land and fire managers undertaking planned burns. These immunities afford stronger protection than an indemnity. This is because they prevent an action being taken at all against a fire manager in specified circumstances, rather than just making the Government responsible for meeting the costs of actions against land and fire managers.

Section 72 of the *Forests Act 1958* (Forests Act) provides an immunity for employees of DELWP, Parks Victoria, and DELWP's partner agencies for actions taken in good faith in undertaking fire management activities under that Act.

Similarly, section 92 of the CFA Act gives an immunity to CFA employees and members for actions taken in good faith under that Act or the regulations under that Act. This immunity also extends, under section 95 of the CFA Act, to other persons complying with any direction given under the CFA Act, which would include DELWP and Parks Victoria fire managers and other firefighters assisting the CFA.

Under these provisions, the liability that would have otherwise been attached to fire managers is borne by the Secretary to DELWP, and the CFA, respectively. This ensures that those who suffer loss or damage from a planned burn still have recourse to pursue an action.

These immunities give land and fire managers conducting planned burns strong comfort that they will not be held personally liable if the burn escapes, where they have acted in good faith in accordance with their statutory powers.

What will be done

The Government has reviewed the existing immunities and considers that these are sufficient and appropriate to address the liability that may arise from planned burning.

Recommendation 7

That the Government conduct a review of fire prevention activities undertaken by local government, including the amounts and sources of funding for such activities and the support of departments and agencies to manage and mitigate risk. The review should include determining compliance with s43 of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* and should consider the appropriate support required to enable Councils to meet their obligations under the Act.

Response: Support in principle

Overview

The Victorian Government acknowledges the integral role of local government in Victoria's emergency management systems, including undertaking fire prevention activities. The Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Update 2016-2019 outlines the Councils and Emergencies Project which aims to enhance the capacity of local governments to meet their obligations in the management of emergencies.

Safer Together aims to deliver fuel management across all land types. Local governments are key land managers and play an important role in the delivery of this shared risk management approach.

What has been done

The first phase of the Councils and Emergencies Project has been completed. This first phase of the project focussed on clarifying and confirming the emergency management responsibilities and activities currently undertaken by local governments. This includes those responsibilities and activities relating to fire prevention. A key finding of phase one of the project was that every council is different, their emergency risk profile varies, their service delivery varies, and a one size fits all approach doesn't work.

What will be done

The Councils and Emergencies Project is continuing. Phase 2 will focus on understanding and assessing councils' emergency management capacity and capability, and phase 3 will develop strategies to address any identified gaps in capacity and capability.

As part of *Safer Together*, land and fire management agencies will continue to partner with local governments to plan and deliver fuel management across private and public land, including land under the management of local government.

Recommendation 8

That a review of the cross-tenure approach be undertaken to determine its effectiveness and to address issues that arise in fire prevention on private and public land.

Response: Support in full

Overview

Safer Together drives a bushfire management approach to more effectively reduce risk by using local knowledge and expertise. The fuel management actions of all private and public land managers and fire agencies must be tailored to suit local needs. A cross-tenure approach to fuel management on private and public land is a central tenet of *Safer Together* to reduce risk and make people safer.

What has been done

Twenty-one cross-tenure fuel reduction burns were conducted during 2016/17. These were supported by long-standing relationships between agencies at a local level. Fire agencies commenced work to build on these local relationships to formalise a cross-tenure bushfire management operating model.

Regional strategic bushfire management planning has begun, across fire agencies, local government and other key partners and stakeholders to plan cross-tenure fuel management. These regional strategic bushfire management plans will enable land and fire agencies to combine their efforts to manage fuel loads on private and public land, based on where and how to most effectively reduce risk in the landscape.

Fire agencies continue to work closely in the development of a Fuel Management System, a system of business practices and a digital information system to support workflow as part of operational delivery of cross tenure fuel management.

What will be done

Strategic cross-tenure bushfire management plans form part of the *Safer Together* delivery program for 2017/18.

The Government is committed to ensuring the cross-tenure fuel management program is effective in reducing bushfire risk. Reviews and improvements of the program are undertaken as a component of implementation, taking into account the monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities which form a fundamental part of the *Safer Together* program of work.

Recommendation 9

That issues of animal welfare be given a higher practical priority in the planned burning process on the ground, including:

- a. Veterinarians and wildlife volunteers (animal rescue teams) should be consulted before and during planned burns to reduce or remove the risk to native animals where possible, and to assist in tending injured wildlife (including euthanasia where necessary); and
- b. Wildlife volunteers (animal rescue teams) be given access to the fire ground as soon as it is safe to assist injured animals.

Response: Support in principle

Overview

The Victorian Government acknowledges that planned burns can impact wildlife. It has in place a planning protocol to minimise wildlife welfare impacts and is developing guidelines of the assessment and treatment of burnt wildlife. Volunteers may be utilised in some response activities where appropriate.

What has been done

Burns undertaken for fuel reduction or ecological purposes occur after extensive engagement and planning which includes the assessment of biodiversity values. Specific prescriptions to mitigate impacts on the identified values are implemented when a planned burn is conducted.

Wildlife specialists identify species present in the landscape that may be impacted by a planned burn. This allows for pre-prepared actions in the event that a sensitive species is present and may be impacted by the burn. This may include adjustment of the timing of the burn, management of fire intensity, exclusion of areas to reduce potential impacts, increased monitoring during the burn, or other appropriate wildlife response activities.

Ongoing research seeks to understand the needs of animals in different types of bushland and the effect of fire on animals and their habitat. This information is utilised when planning and carrying out a burn.

Depending on the potential wildlife impact determined by the planning process, a DELWP led wildlife response team is established within the burn control team prior to ignition. The determination of the size and scope of the wildlife response is determined by defined activation triggers.

What will be done

Guidelines for the assessment of wildlife impacted by fire are being developed in conjunction with a specialist wildlife veterinarian and Zoos Victoria. These are expected to be finalised over the 2017/18 bushfire season.

DELWP and fire agencies are committed to utilising volunteers and community members to support wildlife emergency response operations and planned burning where practical and appropriate. To enable this to occur in a consistent and safe manner, DELWP has revised its protocols for utilising volunteers in wildlife emergency response activities. These protocols give clear guidance on recruitment, training, deployment and supervision of volunteers during emergencies and planned burns.

Volunteers deployed to wildlife responses are required to work within established emergency management structures to maintain personal safety, prevent duplication of effort and ensure the efficient and effective use of resources. For these reasons, volunteers are required to abide by established volunteer management processes which include pre-requisite training and accreditation, registration, communication and reporting procedures, as well as the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the adoption of hazard specific safety measures.

Land and fire agencies will be engaging regionally with wildlife carers and rehabilitators to participate in the training and be pre-registered to support DELWP led response activities.

Recommendation 10

DELWP and its partner agencies, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services, should undertake research into the specific effects on health of people affected by planned burns and the information should be made public. The study should include the direct impacts of smoke on affected populations and impacts on water, food supplies and livestock.

Response: Support in full

Overview

The Victorian Government has dedicated significant funds to research organisations including the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) to conduct research into the impacts of smoke on human health and viticulture as well as tools that can support predictions of where smoke will accumulate. Much of the research and modelling explicitly explores the impact and characteristics of smoke from planned burns.

What has been done

The recently completed study, *Smoke Impacts on Community Health and Social Perceptions* (2016), investigated the impacts of planned burn smoke on community health as well as social perceptions of health risks and community understandings of precaution messaging. The report recommended that community messages for planned burns needed to be specifically targeted to different rural audiences.

The Victorian State Smoke Framework (2015) outlines a whole of government approach to impacts on air quality and the health of communities from significant smoke events, including bushfires or planned burns. The graduated smoke advisory system is the key element of the framework, and links air quality monitoring of fine particles to health protection messages for the community. The graduated smoke advisory system is evidence-based, and is consistent with international best practice in relation to community health impacts from smoke exposure.

Continued in-kind support has been provided to investigate the impact of smoke on wine grapes, through the Centre for Excellence in Smoke Taint.

The Smoke Emissions and Transportation model research undertaken collaboratively with CSIRO and BOM commenced in 2011. As a direct result of this research, the BOM has developed a predictive smoke model currently employed by fire agencies. The model continues to be refined and its accuracy was tested during the 2017 planned burning season with EPA activating mobile monitoring stations in North East Victoria to test and refine the model.

What will be done

Fire, environment and health agencies will continue to ensure advice messages to the Victorian community are consistent and in line with best practice.

Further research into the human health impacts of planned burning is planned as part of Community Impacts of Smoke Project. This project will investigate a means of estimating and monitoring the impacts of smoke on the health of communities from bushfires and planned burns.

The refinement of the predictive smoke model will continue through the current Dynamic Smoke Intelligence Research Project. As the accuracy of the smoke predictive model is improved, its use in operational decision making for planned burns will assist in the mitigation of smoke impacts.

Recommendation 11

In order to manage a reduced time window available to undertake the current types of planned burns, alternative methods, including the Indigenous mosaic 'cool' burns, should be examined and trialled as they may extend the period in which planned burns can be undertaken while reducing overall risk and fuel loads.

Response: Support in full

Overview

As described under Recommendations 3 and 4, the Victorian Government supports the use of cultural burning practices as part of the broader bushfire management program under *Safer Together*. There is a shared aspiration among Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Victorians, land managers, emergency management agencies and private land holders to revitalise cultural burning in Victoria (including Indigenous mosaic 'cool' burns). The time window available for planned burning depends on factors such as weather and underlying landscape dryness. DELWP plans and prepares expansive areas of land to maximise available opportunities for planned burning. Non-burning fuel management methods such as mowing and slashing are also used to reduce bushfire risk, as are non-fuel management strategies such as prepositioning firefighting resources and applying fire restrictions.

What has been done

Engagement with Traditional Owners about cultural burning and examples of existing cultural burning practices are described under Recommendations 3 and 4.

Flexibility is built into fuel management planning, by ensuring the pipeline of planned fuel management is always significantly larger than the amount that would be treated in any given year. This enables Victoria's land management agencies to respond to challenging seasonal conditions and reduced time windows available for burning. Planned burning is also prioritised across Victoria, based on the risk reduction effectiveness of burns and other considerations, such as the condition of fuels. This allows resources to be moved to where they are most needed.

Non-burning fuel management techniques are also used to reduce bushfire risk. These include slashing, mowing, creating and maintaining fuel breaks and infrastructure, such as water points and access roads. In 2016/17, 11,551 hectares were treated using non-burning fuel reduction techniques. Beyond fuel management, risk is managed through positioning firefighters and aircraft across Victoria for rapid response to bushfires when they start, preventing ignition by enforcing compliance, building standards for new housing, developing neighbourhood shelters, issuing community warnings and coordinating evacuations.

What will be done

Ongoing research has supported Traditional Owners in the identification of traditional burning methods, which allow and require burning to occur across a greater window (6–7 months) throughout the year. Continued work with Traditional Owners will examine how burning for cultural values can support an increase in the frequency of burning regimes across the landscape, whilst maintaining fuels at a lower level, potentially enabling burning through an extended period.

The use of mechanical fuel treatments will be extended, particularly around high value assets such as townships where burning may not be appropriate. This supports the outcomes of *Safer Together* through incorporating an integrated approach to fuel treatment methodologies across land tenures.

Through *Safer Together*, DELWP and its partner agencies will use bushfire simulation software to model risk and investigate ways to measure and compare the bushfire risk reduction effectiveness of different bushfire management activities across the areas of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Recommendation 12

In keeping with the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's findings and recommendations, human life has primacy in bushfire-related regulations and it is important that this is maintained in the implementation of bushfire management overlays and relevant vegetation removal exemptions should reflect the primacy of life.

Response: Support in full

Overview

The protection and preservation of human life is afforded priority over all other considerations. This is reflected in the first of six State Emergency Management Priorities. The Victorian Government recognises the importance of planning and building systems for reducing bushfire risk and under *Safer Together*, agencies, local government and local communities work together to undertake and tailor risk-based local management planning.

What has been done

In response to the 2009 VBRC recommendations, DELWP, fire agencies and the CSIRO developed a consistent state-wide mapping criteria and methodology based on best available science and the experiences from previous bushfires. The criteria for applying the BMO mapping are established in *Planning Advisory Note 46 - Bushfire Management Overlay Mapping Methodology and Criteria*.

In the building system, Bushfire Prone Area mapping has been regularly updated since 2011 (every six months to keep pace with urban development where bushfire hazard has been removed) and identifies all areas at risk from bushfires, including grasslands. The building regulations require all structures to be built to the appropriate bushfire construction standard.

In the planning system, the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) identifies areas that could be at risk from extreme bushfire behaviour. In addition to the bushfire building construction requirements, the BMO requires new uses and development to assess bushfire hazards and to implement bushfire safety measures, to mitigate the bushfire risk to protect buildings and communities.

In accordance with Recommendation 37 of the VBRC, the BMO mapping was updated on 3 October 2017 across Victoria through planning scheme amendment GC13 for 64 planning schemes, based on the bushfire hazard criteria in the planning system, forming part of the Government's commitment to continuous improvement to the planning system. All local councils and fire agencies were involved and supported the verification of the mapping prior to its introduction. The mapping update continues to ensure that the risk of extreme bushfire is considered in decision making for the development of land enabling planning authorities and responsible authorities to prioritise the protection of human life. The Victorian planning system also has a variety of policies and provisions for the management and protection of native vegetation.

What will be done

All property owners in these high bushfire risk areas will continue to prioritise the protection of human life and property, which in many cases includes the ability to remove vegetation to create defensible space around existing accommodation (including dwellings) under *Clause 52.48 Bushfire Protection: Exemptions*.

A planning scheme amendment is being prepared to implement the outcomes of the review of native vegetation regulations, and forms part of a package of biodiversity policy reforms. This update clarifies the objectives and strategies for protecting biodiversity, by requiring future land use and development to consider a broader range of native ecological values. The update will also clarify the exemptions to obtain a permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation for certain activities. These updates, supported by the CFA, address uncertainty about the operation of the exemptions, in particular, activities undertaken by public entities. It will also introduce updated and simplified *Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation* and supporting material for councils to ensure vegetation removal policies and exemptions are applied consistently, reflecting the primacy of life.

Abbreviations

ATAS	Arson Trend Analysis System
BMO	Bushfire Management Overlay
BOM	Bureau of Meteorology
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CFA Act	<i>Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic)</i>
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
EAID	Extinguish Arson Intelligence Database
EPA	Environment Protection Authority Victoria
FFMVic	Forest Fire Management Victoria
FMS	Fuel Management System
FOP	Fire Operations Plan
Forests Act	<i>Forests Act 1958 (Vic)</i>
IGEM	Inspector General for Emergency Management
LGV	Local Government Victoria
MFB	Metropolitan Fire Brigade
MER	Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PPE	Personal protective equipment
Safer Together	<i>Safer Together – a new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria (Victorian Government, 2015)</i>
VBRC	Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission
VicPol	Victoria Police

