

Australian Capital Territory

Emergencies (Strategic Bushfire Management Plan for the ACT) 2014 (No 1)

Disallowable instrument DI2014–251

made under the

Emergencies Act 2004, s 72 (Strategic bushfire management plan)

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The first Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) was developed in 2004, and since this time the Plan has underpinned the continuous improvement in bushfire management outcomes in the ACT. The SBMP version 2 was released in October 2009. Under section 80 of the *Emergencies Act 2004* the Plan must be reviewed in consultation with the ACT Bushfire Council every five years.

This SBMP has been developed in accordance with the requirements of the Act. The policies, strategies and actions in this Plan draw on and build upon those developed and implemented through SBMP versions 1 and 2, the lessons learned locally and from other jurisdictions following significant emergencies, and the ongoing contribution of scientific research and analysis to bushfire management.

The review of the Plan also considered the ACT Auditor-General's performance audit report recommendations into bushfire preparedness released in July 2013. The recommendations in the Auditor-General's report specific to bushfire management and preparedness are addressed in parts 1 and 2 of the Plan.

Part 1 of the Plan establishes the context and background for fire management in the ACT.

The Plan takes account the far-reaching impacts of bushfire in the ACT community. It is applicable to all who live and work in the ACT – including people of all ages and backgrounds, whether they are living in Bushfire Prone Areas or in the broader community. The Plan recognises engagement across government, the community and community organisations leads to successful implementation through increased ownership and broader accountability.

Most of the total area burned in the ACT since 1939 has been the result of a relatively small number of large fires; in contrast most bushfires in the ACT occur on the urban edge and in other areas where people congregate. Through understanding the history and cause of bushfires in the ACT, we are better able to target strategies to reduce bushfire risk.

Understanding the nature and effects of bushfire fuel is important, as it is the critical element in reducing bushfire risk because it can be directly modified by land managers to reduce the impact of bushfires on life, property and the environment.

Weather, climate and bushfire are intrinsically linked. Understanding these relationships are needed to identify the impact on the community should a fire occur on any given day, as well as the level of preparedness for the Fire Services. ‘Elevated fire danger conditions’ are considered to occur when the FDI is greater than 50.

Bushfires are an integral component of the landscape of south-eastern Australia, and the Plan takes account of the values of the unique natural environment within and surrounding the city of Canberra. Under this Plan, plant and animal species have been given a value status and are considered assets and recognises that fire management practices play in the continued survival of important ecological communities in the ACT.

Future changes that may increase the risk of bushfire, are considered. The combined impacts of climate change, population change, land-use planning along with community expectations increase the ACT’s bushfire risk profile.

The Plan establishes a clear hierarchy of strategic, operational and tactical plans, and maps. The Plan will encompass a complex, community-wide, and multi-agency set of planning and policy arrangements.

Part 2 of the Plan describes complementary strategies to reduce this risk that is formed around 12 objectives.

These objectives address the risks of bushfire starting, spreading and impacting on people, property and the environment. Part 2 details the policies and actions for each objective and provides the framework for bushfire management in the ACT over the next five years.

Strategies to manage bushfire ignitions will be implemented to reduce the number of unplanned ignitions, targeting systemic and human-caused factors of deliberately lit bushfires (arson) and the careless use of fire.

The Plan recognises effective firefighting operations require skilled and motivated personnel. The ACT Government will support a responsive bushfire fighting capability with sufficient numbers of skilled and motivated personnel to respond to bushfires.

Likewise equipment and resources are required to respond to and extinguish bushfires and the supply of equipment and resources will be supported by clear principles and systems of work to support operations, so that firefighters can respond to bushfires safely and effectively.

This Plan clearly sets out the requirement to extinguish bushfires when they occur with a rapid, decisive and coordinated response providing the best opportunity to control bushfires in the shortest possible time and in a safe manner.

The Government will support fire management on rural lands and rural land managers will undertake a planned, whole-of-property approach to reduce the risk of bushfire to their business and surrounding areas.

Broad-area fuel reduction practices will continue to be used to establish and maintain a range (or mosaic) of differing fuel loads across the broader natural and rural landscape of the ACT. These practices will assist in suppressing bushfires and reducing the impact of bushfires on life and property and the environment.

Government and private land managers will work together to ensure the network of fire trails and helipads provides for rapid response to bushfires and effective bushfire fighting and fuel reduction operations.

Adaptive management provides for continuous improvement in bushfire management and the ACT Government will commit to bushfire research and analysis and to maintaining the flexibility to modify programs to reduce current and future risk based on sound modelling, monitoring, evaluation and lessons learned.

The plans set the objective of having a community that is prepared for bushfires. This is a shared responsibility and the ACT Community is asked to increase its knowledge of bushfire risk and to take actions, as individuals and groups, to minimise the risk they face from bushfires. In partnership, the ACT Government will support at-risk individuals and the community at large to help them understand this risk and be better prepared to make informed and timely decisions when bushfires occur.

The assessment and mitigation of bushfire risk through effective land-use policy and planning will be undertaken to reduce the exposure of the built environment and the natural environment to bushfire.

The Plan establishes the range of measures which will be used to achieve integrated bushfire risk reduction on the urban edge, including development planning, physical works (for example edge roads around new suburbs and fuel reduction in Asset Protection Zones) community education and inspection.

The Plan provides for recovery from the effects of bushfires. It will commence while operations are under way and may be required to continue for a long period following the cessation of response operations. Importantly, it recognises recovery encompasses actions to address the personal, broader social, economic and environmental impacts of bushfires.

Bushfires are an inevitable part of living in the ACT. Along with the rural areas and the mountainous and forested landscape to the west and south, living in the ACT means we live in or near an environment in which bushfire is a natural occurrence. Understanding all of the factors that contribute to bushfire risk and carefully considering the strategies and actions to modify and change the factors forms the basis of this Plan.