

Strategic Bushfire Management Plan Version 5 Draft

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

CANBERRANS WERE INVITED TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON A DRAFT OF THE STRATEGIC BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN VERSION 5

Since the catastrophic bushfires of January 2003, and the impact of the 2019-20 fire season, the ACT Government and community have been proactive in implementing plans to provide increased protection against bushfires for the people, property and environments of the ACT.

The Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) sets out how to protect the ACT community from bushfires and reduce harm caused by bushfires. This plan is reviewed and revised every 5 years.

This draft plan is the fifth version of the SBMP (SBMPv5), building on past bushfire protection measures and lessons learned.

The draft SBMPv5, Implementation Plan and Summary Guide can be found here.

THE CONVERSATION

Quick comments and long responses

Canberrans were provided the opportunity to share their views on the draft plan through the YourSay Conversations platform, with the public consultation period open from the 29th of April to the 11th of July. Both short comments and longer response options were offered. Feedback was welcome on the entire plan, with a focus on the following areas:

- The structure and readability of the plan
- Existing actions under the six objectives
- Additional actions and why they should be included
- Additional outcomes and why they should be included
- How effectively the plan equips the ACT to deal with bushfires now and through the next five years



Face to face & online public consultation sessions

Four in-person consultation session and one virtual session allowed community members and interested stakeholders to discuss the draft of the plan directly with ACT Government representatives. Following these sessions attendees were directed to provide their feedback through the YourSay Conversations platform.

WHO WE ENGAGED

This engagement was targeted at the Canberra Community as a whole, recognising shared responsibility in bushfire harm reduction and preparedness and encouraging diversity in the feedback and perspectives gathered.

Several community and special interest groups and bodies were approached directly and encouraged to submit feedback during the consultation period. This included the Multi-Hazard Advisory Council, NSW Rural Fire Service, ACT Emergency Services Agency staff and volunteers, and relevant Government and private sector stakeholders.



Summary of key insights from the community

All feedback is being closely reviewed and considered by the SBMPv5 working group. Incorporation of feedback into the final version of the plan is dependant on scope, feasibility, relevance, legislative requirements, and budgetary conditions.

Fire management practices, health and environmental concerns

1. While most responses supported controlled burning, some calls were made for consideration of alternative fuel reduction methods such as grazing or ploughing.
2. There was a desire to increase the frequency and boldness of fuel load reduction, suggesting support for more assertive risk mitigation efforts.
3. Respondents highlighted potential health impacts from controlled burn smoke, suggesting fire management strategies need to balance risk reduction with public health and environmental preservation.
4. A call for inclusion of goals around habitat and biodiversity protection, especially for endangered species, indicates support for a holistic approach to controlled burns and fuel load reduction.
5. Consideration of different burn timetables for different site types was raised, including high conservation value natural temperate grassland sites. These burn plans and timings are better addressed in other plans and documentation, and this feedback will be considered outside of the SBMPv5.
6. Some feedback highlighted the need for broader systemic change, including phasing out of fossil fuel project and addressing their influence on policy decisions, linking climate actions directly to bushfire risk management.

Community education, preparedness, inclusion and recovery

7. Respondents emphasised the importance of inclusive, community-consulted campaigns to support preparedness.
8. There was a focus on a need for increased support and targeted messaging for vulnerable populations, overcoming social, economic or language barriers.
9. Multiple responses called for early and consistent involvement of community organisations and community sector groups in the development of community messaging, ensuring that lived experiences of vulnerable and at-risk groups are reflected.

Structuring of the plan, reporting, legislation and accountability

10. Responses asked for a clear governance and accountability structure for who is implementing the various goals and actions of the strategy and implementation plan.
11. Suggestions included clearer outcome statements and performance indicators, measuring effectiveness over the lifetime of the plan.
12. **Feedback highlighted the need for a stronger commitment to action delivery, and greater distinction between business as usual actions and actions that require additional funding.**
13. Feedback was given concerning mandatory content that must be included in the plan, which is outlined in the *Emergencies Act (2004)*.

Cross-border collaboration



14. Multiple responses noted the need for a more explicit reference to the ACT's formal obligations and role in cross-border bushfire management and response, namely NSW RFS and relevant Bushfire Management Councils.
15. Explicit mention was given to the need for joint planning and simulations exercises with NSW RFS, as well as mitigation strategies that extend beyond ACT boundaries developed in close consultation with neighbouring districts. These are covered in more detail through the ACT Parks and Conservation Service's Regional Fire Management Plan.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Feedback will be considered for the plan and possibly incorporated depending on scope and applicability. If we're not able to directly incorporate your feedback into the final document, capturing your perspective will be valuable for related projects and future versions of the SBMP.

You can see project updates at: Strategic Bushfire Management Plan | YourSay ACT

To find out more about other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra visit www.yoursay.act.gov.au.

Key Timings
29th April 2025 – Public Consultation Period opens
11th June 2025 – Public consultation period closed
June - July 2025 – Feedback is considered and implemented into the plan where applicable
10 July 2025 – Cabinet Submission due
10 September 2025 – SBMPv5 scheduled for Cabinet ratification
Following Cabinet ratification SBMPv5 to be published and distributed publicly

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

1,237 visitors
We had 1,237 visitors to the SBMPv5 YourSay page

42 letters
We sent individual letters to 42 organisations and stakeholders

28 responses
We received 28 items of written feedback, both long and short form

38 audience members
We presented to 38 people on the draft of SBMPv5