

STRATEGIC BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

2019–2024 (SUMMARY GUIDE)

This document provides a brief summary of key themes in the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan 2020-2024. The full plan is available on the ACT Emergency Services Agency website.

➞ <https://esa.act.gov.au/about-esa/publications/strategic-bushfire-management-plan>

PURPOSE

The Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) is the overarching document that directs all levels of bushfire planning in the ACT. Its purpose is to provide a strategic framework to protect the ACT community from bushfires and reduce resulting harm to the physical, social, cultural and economic environment of the Territory.

To achieve this, the SBMP sets objectives and actions for:

- agency and community preparation and response for bushfires
- bushfire hazard assessment and risk analysis
- bushfire prevention, including hazard reduction
- adaptive management to apply best practice to bushfire management and prevention practices in the ACT in a changing environment.

Understanding this plan

The SBMP is a requirement of the Emergencies Act. Its contents are defined within the Act.

The SBMP has six themes, each with a set of objectives and outcomes. The plan details the current and ongoing management strategies that inform the actions that apply to each objective.

Some of these actions have become ‘business as usual’ through the implementation of previous SBMPs. They are included in this version to ensure visibility of ongoing activities to reduce bushfire risk in the ACT.

Other actions are new or have been modified to reflect current best practice in bushfire management.

Preparation of this plan took into account the factors expected to play an increasing role in bushfire risk management in the ACT over the next five years of the plan.

These are:

- the important role of the ACT community
- the use of technology and data in bushfire management
- adaptive management for climate change
- recognising the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- bushfire and community recovery.



THEME 1: COMMUNITY

Objectives

1.1 A reduction in bushfire ignitions: Programs will be implemented to reduce the number of ignitions, targeting systemic and human-caused factors of deliberately lit bushfires (arson) and the careless use of fire.

1.2 Planned fire management on all private rural lands: With the support of the ACT Government, private rural land managers will develop a whole-of-property plan to reduce the risk of bushfire to their business and surrounding areas. This plan will be revised every five years or as required.

1.3 A community that is prepared for bushfires: Living in the bush capital means everyone must prepare for bushfires, not just the ACT Government. Lessons from fires worldwide reveal that those in bushfire-prone areas, especially vulnerable individuals, often hesitate to act. The ACT Government conducts campaigns to educate on risks, necessary actions, and response strategies. Recognising that some need assistance to manage risk and during emergencies is vital.

Actions

Fire education and prevention

- Continue fire education and arson intervention programs with ACT Policing.
- Conduct arson investigations per the MOU with ACT Policing.
- Audit the electricity distributor's compliance with vegetation management plans.
- Develop procedures to quickly remove abandoned vehicles in high-risk areas.
- Use predictive modelling, technology, and fire towers for quick ignition detection.

Rural landholder support

- Rural landholders in the BAZ must prepare, submit, and review BOPs every five years.
- Continue supporting rural landholders with fire management plans, prioritising those in the BAZ.
- Update Farm FireWise materials annually to reflect legislative changes.
- Encourage preseason preparation activities with advice on climate risk.
- Increase rural landholder participation in ESA's volunteer services.
- Develop a program to coordinate and prioritise bushfire operations in rural areas and river corridors.

Community engagement

- Develop a community engagement program considering seasonal climate risk, including tailored outreach and targeted education for at-risk groups.
- Encourage and diversify volunteer participation in RFS, F&R Community Fire Units, and other services.
- Provide bushfire warnings and directions following the ACT protocol.
- Work with local media and use social media to spread bushfire awareness.
- Collaboration with NSW RFS on bushfire survival plans, joint information campaigns, volunteer training, and developing a national approach.
- Align community engagement with the ACT Government's communication strategy and collaborate with relevant organisations.
- Commission research on community behaviour, maintain national bushfire warning standards, and update protocols as needed.
- Develop emergency communication tools to provide information during emergencies.
- Train local media to ensure effective reporting and familiarity with emergency services.



THEME 2: FIREFIGHTING OPERATIONS

Objectives

2.1 Effective firefighting operations by skilled and supported personnel: The ACT Government will support a responsive bushfire fighting capability with enough skilled and motivated personnel to respond to bushfires.

2.2 The right equipment and resources to respond to and extinguish bushfires: The ACT Government will ensure an adequate supply of equipment and resources, supported by clear principles and systems of work, to support operations, so firefighters can respond to bushfires safely and effectively.

2.3 Extinguish bushfires when they occur: A rapid, decisive and coordinated response will provide the best opportunity to control bushfires in the shortest possible time and in a safe manner

Actions

Support for firefighters and volunteers

- Support programs for the health, mental health, safety, fitness, and wellbeing of firefighters.
- Volunteer Recruitment: Enhance programs for recruiting and retaining firefighting volunteers.
- Utilise volunteer skills in various roles.
- Maintain a register of all personnel with membership, training and skill information.
- Engage with workforce to understand their needs.
- Update and train on the Australasian Interagency Incident Management System (AIIMS) Version 4.
- Learning Systems: Maintain learning systems to meet Registered Training Organisation requirements.
- Establish minimum standards for active-duty firefighters.

Firefighting capability

- Maintain the ACT Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework.
- Plan and replace vehicles and equipment.
- Maintain aircraft and support infrastructure, collaborate with NSW RFS, and adopt emerging technologies.
- Develop capabilities to predict bushfire behaviour and implement the National Fire Danger Rating System.
- Conduct annual exercises to test readiness.
- Update and distribute plans for initial fire attacks.
- Enhance technologies for information exchange between ESA Headquarters and fire crews.

- Develop technologies for accurate real-time data on fireground personnel.
- Improve bushfire detection systems.

Preparedness and response

- Establish an annual bushfire preparedness calendar.
- Deploy resources to bushfires within set timeframes.
 - a. 30 minutes for fires within the BAZ.
 - b. 45 minutes for rural fires outside the BAZ.
- Aim to contain 95% of bushfires within the first response shift (12 hours).
- Maintain Incident Management Teams capability for the first two shifts.
- Enhance Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT) and develop rapid aerial response teams.
- Review and update the plan based on lessons learned.
- Develop an agency-wide availability and callout application.

Collaboration and research

- Work with research institutions on firefighting methods.
- Review the MOU between EPSDD and ESA.
- Improve response-related data capturing and reporting.
- Update the ACT Bushfire Management Standards.
- Participate in regional bushfire management forums and cross-border planning with NSW.



THEME 3: BROAD AREA FUEL REDUCTION AND FIRE ACCESS

Objectives

3.1 Broad area bushfire fuel reduction across the natural and rural landscape of the ACT: Establish and maintain a range of differing fuel loads across the broader natural and rural landscape of the ACT, to assist in suppressing bushfires and reducing the impact of bushfires on life, property and the environment.

3.2 Access for vehicles and firefighters to undertake bushfire fighting and fuel reduction: Government and private land managers will work together to provide a network of fire trails and helipads that provide safe and effective access for firefighting and fuel reduction operations.

Actions:

Bushfire Operational Plans (BOP)

- ACT Government land managers and entities in the BAZ must prepare, submit, and review a BOP every two years.
- Audit BOP fuel management treatments for compliance.
- Land managers will establish baseline data and report on treatments, fuel hazard and vegetation types.
- Review the Regional Fire Management Plan (RFMP) and plan fuel reduction activities for 2024-2029.
- Continue research on post-fire vegetation, fuel age, and loads to inform RFMP.
- Share data on treatments and assessments with NSW and among ACT Directorates.
- Recognise and use traditional custodians' expertise in managing the land.
- Acknowledge the importance of environmental assets like threatened species in fire management.

Fire management access networks

- Government land managers will identify fire trail constructions, maintenance, and upgrades in their BOPs.
- Audit access management works for compliance.
- Report implementation of access works against BOP timeframes and cumulative actions in RFMPs.
- Review and maintain the fire trails register in the ACT Road Centreline Database.

THEME 4: ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Objectives

4.1 Adaptive management of current and future bushfire risks: The ACT Government will adopt an adaptive management process to address increasing bushfire risks, including climate change, and support continuous improvement based on sound research, modelling, monitoring, evaluation and lessons learned.

Actions:

Research and application

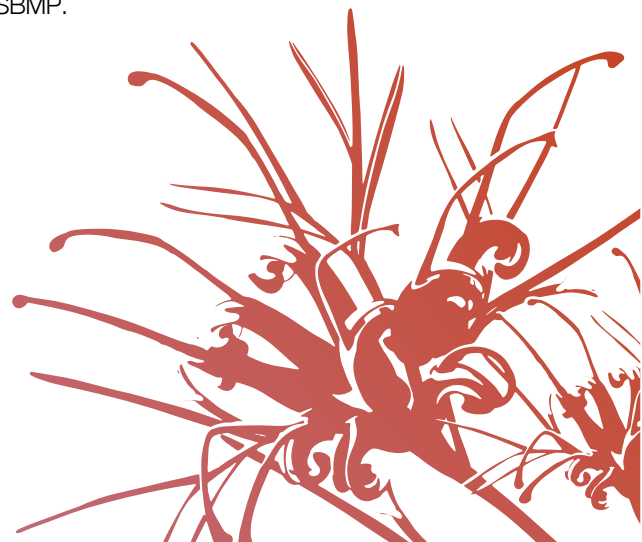
- Continue research on fire behaviour, firefighting methods, and performance, and integrate findings into fire management plans and procedures.
- Research and monitor biodiversity conservation and appropriate fire regimes, focusing on:
 - a. Mitigation measures like unburnt buffers along riparian zones.
 - b. Fire history's impact on fauna diversity, abundance, and habitat.
 - c. Effects of large-scale planned fires on aquatic ecosystems.

Climate monitoring and adaptation

- Monitor global climate systems (e.g., Southern Oscillation Index) affecting bushfire management.
- Research and model long-term climate change impacts on bushfire risk.
- Incorporate climate change projections into disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, focusing on extreme heat, bushfires, and flash flooding.
- Adjust strategies for doctrine, community awareness, fuel management, and response based on climate change models.
- Include climate change research in seasonal and operational risk assessments for bushfire fighting.

Governance

- Develop a governance plan for effective oversight of the SBMP.



THEME 5: LAND-USE PLANNING

5.1 Land-use policy and planning that reduces bushfire risk: The assessment and mitigation of bushfire risk through effective land-use policy and planning will reduce the exposure of built and natural environments to bushfire.

5.2 Integrated bushfire protection at the urban edge: A range of complementary measures will be used to achieve integrated bushfire risk reduction on the urban edge.

Actions:

BPA and fire management zones

- Regularly review and update the Bushfire Prone Area (BPA) map to reflect land-use changes and new technologies.
- Finalise the review of current Fire Management Zones within 12 months, considering budget, resource, and ecological impacts, and consult stakeholders and the community.
- Update Fire Management Zones as needed for significant changes like unplanned bushfires or asset location changes.
- Start a review of Fire Management Zones in 2021–22 to align with the next SBMP and RFMP.
- Review BAZ as needed for land-use changes.
- Provide advice on bushfire risk and mitigation for new developments and strategic land use planning.

Stakeholder collaboration

- Hold an annual forum with directorates and stakeholders to discuss future planning needs and constraints.
- Support bushfire mitigation activities in the Lower Cotter Catchment Reserve Management Plan 2018.
- Collaborate with national land managers on their BOPs for consistency with SBMP goals.
- Revise bushfire risk mitigation controls as part of the Territory Plan review.
- Explore the use of residual risk modelling to inform bushfire mitigation.

Urban and development planning

- Audit and assess BOP fuel management and access works against ACT standards.
- Develop guidelines to limit fire spread and support tree canopy targets.
- Ensure facilities like aged care, schools, and hospitals have emergency management and evacuation plans for bushfires.
- Apply bushfire construction requirements for new or significantly altered properties in BPA.

- Ensure new developments face a bushfire risk no greater than BAL 29, with necessary mitigation zones within the development area.
- Mandate edge roads around new developments for bushfire risk mitigation with ESA Commissioner approval for any alternatives.
- ESA Commissioner must approve blocks in BPA for sensitive uses like schools or aged care facilities in new estates.

THEME 6: BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

6.1 Supported communities for bushfire recovery: Bushfire recovery overlaps with response efforts and extends well beyond, addressing social, economic, and environmental impacts on individuals, communities, and nature.

Actions:

- Provide support for bushfire-affected communities to assess damage quickly and rebuild to handle future emergencies and improves social, economic, and environmental aspects.
- Activate the Recovery Sub-Plan, considering the impact on businesses, providing immediate support tailored to individual needs, and assessing risks to minimise further harm to people, property, and the environment.
- Identify and apply lessons learned from the recovery process in the ACT and other areas to enhance future recovery efforts.
- Support the post-fire Burned Area Assessment Team's rapid environmental risk assessment method for natural and cultural site recovery, including developing approaches for all hazards, such as floods, and creating a consistent national approach for rapid environmental risk assessment.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

The SBMP includes a governance plan to ensure effective oversight and implementation. Regular monitoring and reporting on a range of performance indicators will help measure the effectiveness of the plan, encouraging continuous improvement and innovation. This approach aligns with adaptive management principles, allowing for adjustments based on new information and changing conditions.

CONCLUSION

The SBMP provides a detailed and strategic approach to bushfire management in the ACT. By setting clear objectives, actions, and outcomes, the SBMP aims to protect the community and reduce the impacts of bushfires through comprehensive planning, community engagement, and adaptive management practices.



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