

Department for Environment and Water

The story of managing fire

Our statement of intent



Government
of South Australia

Department for
Environment and Water





The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) is a custodian of national parks, botanic gardens, heritage places and Crown lands. This means it manages public lands for South Australians on behalf of the Minister for Environment and Water.

This involves managing native vegetation including threatened species and ecological communities (across public and private land) through legislation and regulation that protects the environment.

As a manager of public lands, DEW runs a National Parks and Wildlife Service SA Fire Management Program made up of people who are passionate about the environment, and who use their skills to reduce bushfire risk and improve biodiversity across these lands. This professional team has expertise in fire planning, fire ecology, prescribed burning and suppressing bushfires.

And because fire doesn't respect borders, a Burning on Private Land Program was created, in partnership with the CFS, to conduct prescribed burns on strategically located private land. These fires will reduce fuel loads in areas at greatest risk of bushfire across the state, and link to the public land prescribed burns program.

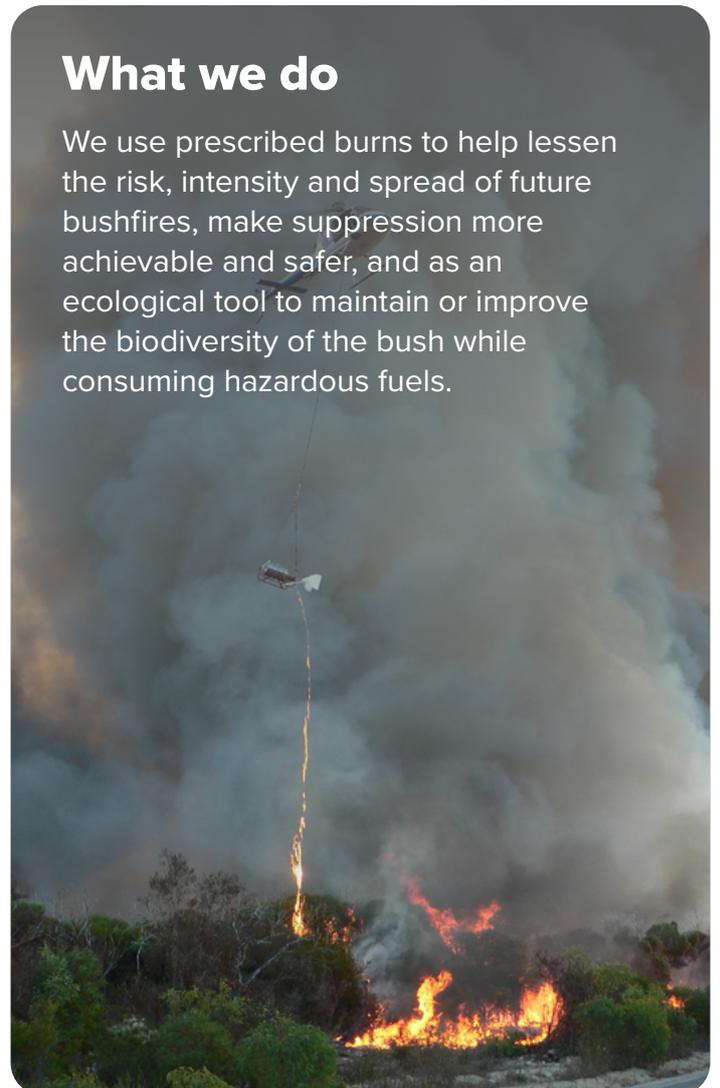
Acknowledgement

DEW acknowledges the First Peoples of South Australia; the Aboriginal Customary Owners and the role that Aboriginal People continue to have in purposefully shaping and caring for the area that we now know as South Australia.

We respect Traditional Owners' rights, interests and obligations to speak for and care for Country in accordance with customary laws, beliefs and traditions. We appreciate the perspective of Aboriginal People that the land, water, air and all living things are connected and we are thankful for their insights.

What we do

We use prescribed burns to help lessen the risk, intensity and spread of future bushfires, make suppression more achievable and safer, and as an ecological tool to maintain or improve the biodiversity of the bush while consuming hazardous fuels.





Reduce risk

We reduce the risk of bushfires to human life, property, infrastructure and environmental assets by reducing fuel with the right kind of fire in the right place, at the right time and applied in the right way AND by modifying vegetation with lopping, chipping, slashing, rolling or weeding.

We aim to do this in an environmentally sensitive way, on public or private land, where a high risk has been identified.

Respond to bushfire

We are a skilled team of fire specialists with firefighting appliances across the state to prepare for and respond to bushfires wherever they occur.

The team operates as the largest brigade of the CFS and includes staff who help manage emergencies with expertise in incident control, mapping, managing data, predicting fire behaviour and natural values.

We help with interstate and overseas bushfires as part of cooperative arrangements with other emergency services.

How we do it

Build skilled teams

We are professionals with skills in fire and land management, risk, planning and ecology, who work in partnership with other emergency service agencies and the community.

We maintain the agency's firefighting capacity and skills through training, learning and development, and maintain firefighting equipment, tracks and infrastructure in strategic locations across the state.

Understand the ecology

We use the ecological process of fire as a tool to manage the environment to help native plants establish and improve habitat for animals, or to help with weed control.

We do this as part of our planning, which includes strategies for native plant species that require fire or are sensitive to fire.

Our work is underpinned by:

1. People

Fire management is everybody's business and everyone has a role to plan and be prepared for a bushfire.

We collaborate with the CFS; conservation and industry groups; other state government agencies that manage public land; and state and national emergency management agencies, to reduce bushfire risk and/or fight fires.

We support a culture of high-quality and effective stakeholder and community engagement.

We are committed to working with, and learning from, Aboriginal Nations to manage fire in the landscape.

2. Planning

We continuously plan, assess and monitor to minimise risks and maximise benefits to communities, and to preserve and enhance biodiversity.

This means decisions are well considered and based on the best available knowledge.

A huge amount of behind the scenes work is done before an area is burnt. For example, planning for a burn includes an environmental assessment which asks: What plants and animals live there? How will they respond to fire at different

times of their lifecycles? Are there big trees that provide shelter, that need to be protected? As we go through this process we might decide to go ahead, postpone or cancel that burn, or work out ways to reduce any negative impact.

A test burn is also carried out to test fuel moisture and fire behaviour, and the Bureau of Meteorology is also consulted as weather is the most important factor for a safe burn (e.g. wind direction and speed, relative humidity, temperature and fuel moisture).

3. Knowledge

We use the best available global, national and local science, data and knowledge and adapt our plans based on what we find out.

We manage spatial data, and undertake monitoring, evaluation and research. Learning lessons from each event is an important part of managing fire, which goes towards helping to reduce the impact of future bushfires and keeping communities safer.

4. Value

We proudly serve the community of South Australia and ensure that public funds are wisely invested to reduce bushfire risk to the community and enhance the environment.

Our work environment

Our work is driven by a range of State and Commonwealth Acts, Regulations and policies.

The key drivers are:

- *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*
- *Wilderness Protection Act 1992*
- *Crown Land Management Act 2009*
- *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005*
- *Emergency Management Act 2004*
- *Native Vegetation Act 1991*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*
- South Australian Country Fire Service's Operational Doctrine
- National Bushfire Management Policy Statement for Forests and Rangelands (prepared by The Forest Fire Management Group for COAG, 2014; www.aidr.org.au)
- Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Doctrine; www.afac.com.au
- Centre of Excellence for Prescribed Burning and Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience guidelines, best practice and other documentation; www.aidr.org.au
- State Emergency Management Plan; Part 2 (prepared under the *Emergency Management Act 2004*) assigns DEW and other agencies coordinating roles in natural resources and environment recovery after disaster events.



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