

Native trees in burnt areas

Fact sheet | December 2019



In the weeks and months immediately after a bushfire, affected landholders commence the major task of clean-up and repair.

It is during this time that some people unnecessarily clear native trees that have been burnt or scorched during the fire.

Eucalypt trees found in the Northern and Yorke region are well adapted to bushfires and most will continue to grow normally following a fire.

What this means is that the removal of native trees that do not pose a safety risk harms our environment and threatens wildlife.

You can help your local environment recover from fire by allowing native trees to remain in the landscape and naturally regenerate.

Our trees look dead, will they recover?

Eucalypts are well adapted to bushfires and have an amazing capacity to recover quickly. Even severely burnt trees that might initially appear dead will be actively recovering, however this activity occurs out of sight, beneath the bark!

The first signs of recovery can usually be seen after a few months when new leaves push their way out from beneath the blackened bark.

In mallee there is a woody structure at the base of the stems that has many dormant buds. These are likely to sprout after fire which starts the recovery process.

In the following months it may become apparent (when all other trees have resprouted) that some trees haven't survived.

Trees that don't recover from fire are likely to be those that are under some other 'stress' (e.g. from prolonged drought, soil diseases, excess soil nutrients from fertiliser etc.).

However, even dead trees provide important habitat so they shouldn't be removed unless absolutely necessary.

For example, birds like the Scarlet Robin (an endangered species in the Southern Yorke Peninsula) preferentially use areas with dead trees and fallen timber.



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Why are trees important?

Trees are a critical part of our landscape. They provide important habitat for native animals like birds, pygmy possums and micro-bats (small insectivorous bats).

Much of this wildlife plays an important role in keeping insect populations in balance. This is important for the natural environment and agricultural production.

Trees in agricultural landscapes also provide shelter for stock and help reduce soil erosion.

Trees that contain hollows are especially important because many native animals require these hollows to shelter and nest in.

Hollows develop as trees age and are often only present in large trees that are over 100 years old.

This makes these trees and their hollows irreplaceable in our lifetime.

Are trees significant fuel for bushfires?

In a bushfire, the most significant fuels are in fact 'fine fuels' such as grass, leaves, bark and twigs, that are less than 6 mm in diameter.

Fine fuels catch fire easily when dry and 'carry' a fire. To reduce bushfire risks, it is important to manage debris and vegetation that makes up these fine fuels near your home and around other assets.

In areas around assets, you may need to trim low branches as they can help connect fine fuels below a tree with the tree canopy.

Any trees within 20 metres of your home should not overhang the house and it's recommended to have spaces between tree canopies. But remember "trees are not your enemy. They can trap embers, reduce wind speeds and act as a radiant heat shield" (source: CFS booklet *Your guide to bushfire safety*).

For further information about managing native vegetation to reduce bushfire risks, refer to the CFS website: www.cfs.sa.gov.au.



Watch with wonder as new eucalypt leaves push their way out from beneath burnt bark

Are burnt trees dangerous?

Only a small proportion of eucalypt trees that are burnt will collapse or drop branches during or after a fire. To determine if a burnt tree is a hazard you need to consider:

- the **likelihood** of the tree or a portion of it falling
- the **chance of it causing significant damage or injury** if it does fall (i.e. trees that are not close to houses or work areas are unlikely to cause damage even if they do fall)

Trees or branches that are susceptible to falling have typically been burnt out internally. This is often easy to see.

If you are concerned about a tree, a qualified arborist will be able to provide advice on whether it is likely to be a risk or not.



Eucalypts resprout following the Bangor fire





A local insectivore, the Owlet-nightjar makes its home in tree hollows. Photo by Duncan MacKenzie.

Is it legal to clear trees?

To conserve the health of our environment and its biodiversity, native trees and bushland are protected under the *Native Vegetation Act 1991*.

- Native vegetation and trees within 20 metres of a house or 'prescribed building' and 5 metres of a 'prescribed structure' can be cleared for bushfire risk management. (Note: trees within this zone, with a circumference of 2 metres or more, are considered significant and cannot be cleared without approval). The Native Vegetation Management section on the CFS website provides detailed information on vegetation clearance permitted for fuel management.
- Naturally occurring trees (not planted ones) that are not within this zone cannot be cleared unless they pose a **significant safety risk** (i.e. if they fall they are reasonably likely to cause injury or damage. See the *Are burnt trees dangerous?* section).

Can I collect fallen timber?

Where possible, fallen timber from native trees should be left on the ground as habitat.

Fallen timber provides shelter and foraging places for native animals, it shelters young seedlings and small plants from heat and drying winds and is important in the recycling of nutrients.


In recognition of the valuable habitat provided by fallen timber, its removal from roadsides is prohibited in most local council areas under the *Local Government Act 1999*.

Further information

Post-fire natural resources management information is available on our website or from your local natural resources centre.

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/northernandyorke





Natural resources centres

Clare (08) 8841 3400

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