



CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 88

PRESCRIBED BURNING

July 2015

1. OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 To provide corporate direction and guidance for the management of prescribed burning operations on lands managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (the department).
- 1.2 To specify how prescribed burning is to be used to manage bushfire-related risk, protect communities and built and natural assets and deliver other management objectives, and how risk associated with prescribed burning of any type is to be managed.

2. SCOPE

This policy is applicable to the department's management of land that is classified in the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) as a State forest; a timber reserve; a national park; a conservation park; a nature reserve; land referred to in section 5(1)(g) and vested in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia (Conservation Commission); land referred to in section 5(1)(h) and under the care, control and management of the Conservation Commission; or land that, under an agreement made in accordance with section 8A(5)(b), is managed for a public purpose that is consistent with the CALM Act. These lands are referred to in this policy as CALM Act land. This policy is also applicable to land managed by the department under the *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006* (SCRM Act). These lands are referred to as SCRM Act land. The bushfire prevention aspects of this policy are applicable to unallocated Crown land and unmanaged reserves outside the metropolitan area, regional centres and townsites. Aspects of the policy related to the powers conferred on CALM Act officers by section 45 of the *Bush Fires Act 1954* are applicable to land listed in section 45 of the Bush Fires Regulations 1954.

3. CONTEXT

The amount and distribution of flammable vegetative material (fuel) on CALM Act and SCRM Act land is a key factor in determining the susceptibility of those lands to bushfires.

Bushfires can result in a range of adverse effects to the wellbeing of people and their communities, public and private assets, biodiversity, heritage, critical infrastructure, public enjoyment and amenity, and economic activity. Collectively, this uncertainty or potential for adverse effects is termed "bushfire-related risk".

The potential severity (scale and impact) of bushfires on human communities and the environment can be significantly reduced by the appropriate use of prescribed burning to manage fuel hazard.

In addition to reducing bushfire-related risk to human life and property, prescribed burning can be used to achieve a range of land management objectives including the

conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, maintenance of ecosystem health, conservation of soil, water and catchment values, regeneration and protection of native forests and plantations, private and public infrastructure, natural and cultural heritage, recreation sites and scenic values.

Sections 33(1)(a) and 33(3) of the CALM Act and section 33(1) of the SCRM Act provide for the department to manage lands to which the Acts apply. Prescribed burning is recognised by the Government of Western Australia as a valid and necessary technique for both land management generally and the treatment of bushfire-related risk.

Since the 1960s successive governments have supported prescribed burning in the south-west forest areas managed by the department. Government support for the use of prescribed burning now extends to the lands managed by the department across Western Australia.

While prescribed burning is used to treat bushfire-related risk, the introduction of planned fire is also a source of risk. Care, expertise and the application of scientific knowledge and professional judgement are needed in the selection, planning and conduct of prescribed burns. In this way it is more likely that the specific purposes of prescribed burns will be achieved and that unintended consequences are avoided.

This policy is consistent with and recognises the requirements contained in other relevant Parks and Wildlife policies. In particular, it should be read in conjunction with Corporate Policy Statement No. 19 - Fire management.

4. LEGISLATION

Legislation relevant to this policy includes:

- *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984;*
- *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006;*
- *Bush Fires Act 1954;*
- *Bush Fires Regulations 1954;*
- *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950;* and
- *Environmental Protection Act 1986.*

5. POLICY

- 5.1 The department will use prescribed burning to reduce bushfire-related risk to communities and built and natural assets at both the local scale and the landscape scale, and also to achieve biodiversity conservation, forest silviculture, research and other land management objectives.
- 5.2 Assessment of bushfire-related risk will be a key factor in the selection and prioritisation of areas for prescribed burning activities. Such assessments, which will be conducted in accordance with the department's standards, will consider both the area to be burnt and adjacent areas (whether or not these are under the control of the department). Based on this process, the department will maintain a forward program of prescribed burns.
- 5.3 Planning for prescribed burning will be strategic, incorporating the need for biodiversity conservation; protecting other values; reducing the risk of harm from bushfires and avoidance of other threatening processes at both the landscape scale and land management unit scale. Indicative three year, where appropriate, and one year prescribed burn programs will be prepared by each region.

- 5.4 The department recognises the legitimate interests, knowledge and experience of internal and external stakeholders. It will regularly communicate and consult with key stakeholders including the Office of Bushfire Risk Management (OBRM), Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), Forest Products Commission, local government, traditional owners, industry and community interest groups in the development of the indicative three and one year prescribed burn programs. The programs will be submitted to Corporate Executive for approval each year.
- 5.5 The department will facilitate community awareness of the rationale for application of prescribed burning.
- 5.6 Prescribed burning will be planned in accordance with the department's standards and conducted in accordance with the prescribed fire plan. As a part of the planning process, the risks associated with the conduct of each prescribed burn will be assessed and treated as necessary, in order that the risk is within the department's risk criteria.
- 5.7 The Government has endorsed the department exercising greater flexibility in smoke management in order to achieve its prescribed burn programs. However, potential impacts of smoke and ash on residential communities, commercial interests, water catchments, road traffic, neighbours and visitors will be considered when planning and implementing prescribed burns with the intent of minimising impacts. To ensure compliance with policy the department will seek the responsible Minister's endorsement of the prescribed burn program in grape and wine production regions annually.
- 5.8 Prescribed burning will be planned, directed and conducted by competent and experienced staff.
- 5.9 Risk assessment and the selection of risk treatments will be undertaken as part of all decision-making associated with prescribed burning in a manner consistent with the risk management process specified in AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009 *Risk management: Principles and guidelines*.
- 5.10 The department will provide the resources, delegations, documentation and other organisational arrangements that are necessary to implement this policy and, in consultation with OBRM, will establish an assurance program to confirm that this has been achieved.
- 5.11 The department will conduct, collaborate in, sponsor and monitor research into fire behaviour, ecology and operational practice that contributes to the improvement of prescribed burning management.
- 5.12 The department will pursue collaborative arrangements, including integrated training programs, with DFES and other fire authorities and institutions.
- 5.13 The extent to which prescribed burning objectives have been achieved will be monitored and recorded by the department, in order to continue the process of adaptive management through a review and improvement program.

6. STANDARDS

Risk assessment and the selection of risk treatments will be undertaken as part of all decision-making associated with prescribed burning in a manner consistent with the risk management process specified in the standard AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009 *Risk management: Principles and guidelines*.

The standards for the development of prescribed fire programs and prescribed fire plans and for the conduct of individual prescribed burns are detailed in the department's code of practice for fire management, prescribed fire manual and relevant standard operating procedures.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1 The **Director General** is responsible for approval of this policy, determining the department's risk management framework, risk criteria, ensuring that the resources and authorities are in place to enable the policy to be implemented and, assisted by the Director Regional and Fire Management Services, monitoring "very high" risk, the correct functioning of critical controls and the effective implementation of the policy. The Director General may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to prescribed burning and the acceptance of risk to other staff but will monitor the related performance of those staff.
- 7.2 The **Director Regional and Fire Management Services** is accountable to the Director General for ensuring that those staff involved in prescribed burning have the necessary competencies, delegations and resources to comply with the department's standards and to maximise the achievement of the program of prescribed burning. The Director may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to prescribed burning and the acceptance of risk to other staff but will monitor the related performance of those staff.
- 7.3 The **Manager Fire Management Services Branch** is responsible for developing, maintaining and ensuring implementation of the department's policies, standards, procedures, guidelines and other requirements in relation to prescribed burning; establishing and maintaining a system to monitor officer competence; operational liaison with OBRM and will be responsible for all technical matters relating to the department's prescribed burn programs.
- 7.4 **Managers** (including Manager Fire Management Services Branch and Directors) are responsible for applying and complying with standards, procedures and documents relating to prescribed burning in their areas of responsibility and for monitoring the correct functioning and ongoing applicability of risk controls.
- 7.5 **Employees** will fulfil their specific functions in relation to this policy.

8. CUSTODIAN

Director Regional and Fire Management Services.

9. PUBLICATION

This policy will be made available on the department's public website and intranet.

10. KEY WORDS

Prescribed burning; prescribed fire; bushfire-related risk; prescribed burn risk management; risk management framework; risk treatment; planned fire.

11. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed no later than July 2018.

12. DIRECTOR GENERAL APPROVAL

Approved by



Jim Sharp
DIRECTOR GENERAL

Effective date: 26 July 2015