

## COMMUNIQUE

The State Bushfire Advisory Council (SBAC) met at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Bushfire Centre of Excellence, on the 4 December 2023, for the fourth and final meeting of 2023.

In November the Chair provided an update on the progress of the SBAC's work to the Minister for Emergency Services.

### Wooroloo Bushfire Independent Review Recommendations Implementation

The SBAC noted the release of the second edition of the public reporting document was released on 7 August. The next edition of the report is currently being updated and is expected to be released by the end of 2023. The report resides with the Wooroloo Independent Review on the government webpage at [WA Government website](#).

The SBAC noted the Wooroloo Intra Action Review report was now being finalised. This review which aims to understand whether lessons identified are becoming lessons learned. The report will be presented to the SBAC at their March 2024 meeting.

The SBAC received briefings from project leads on the progress of recommendations 3 and 7.

Recommendation 3 requires DFES to continue development of the bushfire risk planning framework and guidelines to allow implementation, coordination, and prioritisation of cross tenure Bushfire Risk Management Plans across WA local governments.

Recommendation 7 seeks to improve traffic management at major bushfires including the use of vehicle control points and restricted access permits during major incidents.

The SBAC were also briefed on the closure of recommendation 10 - DFES, in consultation with local government, should review the Impact Assessment Process (IAP) to ensure information is captured and made available to relief and recovery agencies in a timely and effective way.

*The SBAC endorsed the closure of Recommendation 10.*

More information on the Implementation of the Review recommendations can be obtained from the updated public reports or by emailing [RuralFire@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:RuralFire@dfes.wa.gov.au)

### Consolidated Emergency Services Act Update

Key messages provided to the SBAC:

The drafter from Parliamentary Counsel's office has been delayed and unable to recommence on the Exposure Draft Bill until early 2024.

The Government will do everything possible to release the Draft Bill for consultation after the high-threat period.

This legislation is more complex than anticipated and will require genuine consultation that is not rushed. The SBAC noted the update on the CES Act and look forward to further discussions at the appropriate time.

### Places of Last Resort (PLR)

The SBAC received an update on the progress of the work completed to date including:

Completion of the review of terminology - DFES suggests term "Neighbourhood Place of Last Resort" (NPLR) be used to mean "a local open space or building where people may gather as a last resort when threatened by a hazard".

DFES has committed to development of a state level position statement and guidelines/toolkit in relation to NPLR. This will be achieved through collaboration with other stakeholders.

A DFES working group has been established to work through defining options for roles and responsibilities in identification, establishment and management of PLR.

Future Work identified:

A paper summarising internal working group findings and legal position(s) (Autumn 2024)

Engage externally with key stakeholders to develop final roles and responsibilities to inform framework (Autumn – Winter 2024)

Guidance to be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, investigate pilot exercises. (Draft – 2024/2025).

SBAC noted the progress of work and complexities with this project.

## Items for Future Consideration

The SBAC maintain a register of future agenda items of suggested topics and issues raised by members. This list of current items was discussed during the meeting.

Members received an update on the present on-ground mitigation of serious bushfire risk on parcels of UCL/UMR outside of the metro area and the regional towns across WA (delivered in practice by DBCA), and on State land under the care, control and management of various regionally based Local Governments.

The SBAC noted DPLH was presently in discussion with DPIRD, re the details of a third Royalties for Regions grant, to continue this important work over the period 2024/25 – 2027/28.

Members also received an update on the Forest Management Plan 2024-2033.

In its Report, the EPA recommended that condition be applied to the proposal which would limit prescribed burning to no more than 200,000 ha per year. The Appeals Committee noted that two key issues were raised on appeals in respect to prescribed burning. The first related to the contended environmental impacts of prescribed burning, and the second related to the EPA proposed annual limit of 200,000 ha for prescribed burning. In relation to applying a limit to the area of prescribed burning, the Minister noted that DBCA has a legislative responsibility to undertake prescribed burns and in doing so is required to consider a range of factors including environmental, social and community safety. DBCA must also ensure the prescribed burn program aligns with the State Government's State Strategic Control Priorities that lists the protection and preservation of life as the fundamental overarching priority for the State for all hazards. In its advice, the EPA acknowledges that the Minister for Environment may consider the impacts of the proposal against broader social and economic objectives of the State. While the Minister acknowledged there is some contention within parts of the community in relation to elements of DBCA's prescribed burning program, the Minister was not satisfied there is substantial evidence to suggest that burning over 200,000 ha in any one year presents serious environmental risks. For these reasons, the Minister did not believe that annual or total limits are appropriate. In coming to this decision, prescribed burning must always be based on contemporary science and as such it is incumbent on DBCA to adapt its operations as a result of future research. The Minister believed there was merit in the Committee's advice that a specific research program investigating the measured impacts on forest ecosystems and biodiversity from fire management strategies be implemented.

Suggestions of future agenda items raised by members will be added to the register.

## Plantation Management

SBAC were provided with an introduction to plantation management in response to queries raised at the September meeting.

Topics covered included and overview of the plantation forestry industry in WA, governance, fire response capability, training and innovation and risk reduction.

The next SBAC meeting is scheduled for Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

For SBAC related information or enquiries, please email [RuralFire@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:RuralFire@dfes.wa.gov.au)