

2025 North Australia Fire Managers Forum - Post-Event Summary

Held over three days, the North Australia Fire Managers (NAFM) Forum was held in Broome on 2-4 July 2025 and brought together fire practitioners, researchers, Indigenous leaders and government representatives to explore the evolving landscape of fire management across Australia's north.

The forum's theme *'Advancing Operational Excellence - Overcoming Barriers, Enhancing Incentives, Strengthening Collaboration'* was designed to foster knowledge exchange, encourage the sharing of experiences and create valuable networking opportunities among participants.

The event opened with a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony led by Yawaru Elder and Matriarch Aunty Dianne Appleby, grounding the forum in cultural respect and connection to Country.

The Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Paul Papalia CSC MLA and Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm AFSM opened the event emphasising the importance of collaboration, innovation and cultural leadership in shaping fire management strategies.

Trevor Howard, Chair of NAFM, provided an overview of the network's history, mission and progress, followed by a keynote from AFAC Chief Executive Officer Robb Webb and Professor Jeremy Russell-Smith from Charles Darwin University, who explored the historical and emerging significance of nature-based fire schemes and national initiatives supporting the top end of Australia.

With climate change increasing uncertainty in northern Australia's fire operations, rising temperatures and shifting weather patterns challenging traditional approaches, Natural Hazards Research Australia's Brendan McAtee led a session with climate experts Mika Peace and Andrew Dowdy who emphasised the need to adapt prescribed burning and emissions avoidance strategies to remain effective and culturally appropriate.

Innovation was a key theme, with Andrew Edwards leading a session on satellite technologies and savanna fire simulations. These tools, developed by Charles Darwin University and PEC Consultants, are enhancing fire planning and monitoring across tenures, supporting collaboration among Indigenous, pastoral, and conservation groups. Further sessions highlighted operational strategies from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, emphasising aviation lessons and the importance of strong relationships with landholders.

Interstate collaboration was celebrated through new agency arrangements in the NT and Qld and initiatives like the Women's Prescribed Burn Training Exchange. Western Australia's DFES Cultural Fire Program and Kimberley Region approaches were spotlighted, showcasing the power of community-led fire management. Sessions also addressed the rising cost of insurance for fire and carbon projects, calling for greater understanding of northern contexts by insurers.

Grey Mackay from Land Alliance provided valuable insights into the success of the Fitzroy Fire Working Group, including the benefits of long-term collaboration with pastoralists who have different perspectives based on the nature of their country. Chris Morrow from the



Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association discussed strategies for managing grazing and fire in spinifex country, from his many years at Nerrima Station.

Day 2 concluded with forward-looking discussions on building capability and resilience. Presenters shared tools from CSIRO's National Bushfire Intelligence Capability and highlighted Indigenous-led carbon initiatives, emphasising the integration of cultural knowledge and the vital role of women. The NHRA's 'Be Ahead of Ready' initiative was introduced as a transformative step toward long-term change through proactive planning and mutual learning.

Day 3 wrapped up with field trips focused on Remote Fire Management and Collaborative Fire Management in the Kimberley.

The first field trip explored innovative fire management practices in the Kimberley region. Participants visited White Dam, a remote operations site, to learn about traditional knowledge and modern technology working together. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) showcased strategic mapping tools and remote suppression techniques, while local Aboriginal corporations and pastoralists shared insights into collaborative fire planning. The trip highlighted the importance of culturally informed approaches, supported by a live demonstration of DBCA's 800L Bambi bucket aerial suppression system.

The second field trip to Roebuck Plains Station focused on how different groups work together to manage fire in the Kimberley region. Participants visited the Dampier Peninsula, hosted by Yawuru and Rangelands NRM, to learn about local fire management efforts. The trip highlighted how traditional knowledge and modern tools are used by DBCA and community groups to plan and carry out burns. The session also showcased how working together across different land areas helps protect the environment and support cultural practices.

The Forum wrapped up with a chance to reflect, share feedback, and help shape future events. A recap of key issues reinforced the vital role of fire in land management and the need to connect regional fire managers with national conversations.

More than 80 attendees from Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia took part, showing strong commitment to the event. Across three days, a diverse lineup of speakers covered a wide range of topics, with panel discussions and workshops standing out as highlights.

The Forum program was shaped by input from the NAFM Working Group, with DFES BCoE staff working closely with them to ensure the event met the needs of this unique group. Creating space for networking was a key goal, with generous breaks and evening events helping attendees connect and share ideas.

The Broome Civic Centre provided a great setting, with plenty of indoor and outdoor spaces for people to mingle and hold informal discussions throughout the event.

Overall, the event was a resounding success with many attendees stating that they were very satisfied with the variety and quality of topics and speakers. Evaluation feedback showed:

- Overall experience at the event – 86% rated the event Very Good and Excellent.



- Organisation of the event - 89% rated the event Very Organised and Extremely Organised.
- Variety of presentation topics - 100% were Satisfied with session topics finding them relevant and suitable to their professional needs.

The most valuable aspects of the Forum were Range of information and Networking opportunities.

The DFES Bushfire Centre of Excellence together with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions would like to thank all presenters, facilitators and participants for their participation for contributing to a forum rich in knowledge, collaboration and cultural respect. The insights shared will help shape a more resilient, informed and inclusive future for fire management across northern Australia.



The event video can be viewed [here](#).

