

Karla Katitjin Fire Knowledge Forum 2026 - Post-Event Summary

Fire for the Future: Sustainable Practice, Resilient Landscapes, Safer Communities

The 2026 Karla Katitjin Fire Knowledge Forum convened in Nambeelup over two days, bringing together representatives from government agencies, land management organisations, Traditional Owner groups, research institutions and industry from across Australia. The forum provided a structured environment for examining current challenges, sharing emerging knowledge and strengthening national capability in planned burning. Across all sessions, participants demonstrated a strong commitment to collaboration, continuous improvement and the advancement of planned fire practices in Australia.

The event commenced on Tuesday 4 August afternoon with a Sundowner at the Bushfire Centre of Excellence with attendees enjoying the relaxed setting and getting ready for the next few days ahead.

Day One – Wednesday 5 August

Bushfire Centre of Excellence Chief Superintendent John Tillman welcomed attendees, outlining forum objectives and emphasising the importance of cross-sector cooperation. Opening remarks were provided by Hon Reece Whitby MLA, Commissioner Darren Klemm AFSM and AFAC Chief Executive Officer Rob Webb. Each speaker highlighted the increasing complexity of planned burning programs, the pressures associated with changing environmental conditions, and the need for sustained investment in capability, research and community engagement.

The Bindjareb Community delivered a Welcome to Country. This opening acknowledged the cultural significance of fire and the enduring stewardship of Traditional Owners, establishing an appropriate foundation for the discussions that followed.

The first session, facilitated by Trevor Howard, National Manager, AFAC Prescribed Burning Strategy revisited the outcomes of the 2024 Planned Burning, Capability and Future Directions Workshop. Stefan de Haan, Manager Fire Management Services from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservations and Attractions (DBCA) presented an overview of progress made since the workshop and identified areas requiring continued attention. His presentation underscored the dynamic nature of planned burning, shaped by operational, ecological and social factors.

Following morning tea, the forum examined current challenges in the planned burning environment. Under the facilitation of John Tillman, presenters from Water Corporation, Indigenous Desert Alliance and Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation provided case studies illustrating the diverse issues faced by practitioners. These included access to training and equipment, governance and assurance requirements, operational complexity across multi-tenure landscapes, and the integration of cultural knowledge. The session highlighted the breadth of capability required to deliver safe and effective planned burning programs.

During the workshop component of the forum, attendees were asked to break into small groups to discuss the role of planned burning within their organisations, their current level



of planned burning capability, and the challenges they face in delivering planned fire programs. Across the groups, several consistent themes emerged. Participants identified asset protection, ecological regeneration and cultural connection to Country as core purposes for planned burning. They also highlighted organisational challenges including tenure complexity, staff retention, narrow and increasingly unpredictable burning windows, funding constraints and public perception. A recurring point of discussion was the difficulty of communicating the importance of preparing for bushfire risk in periods when no major events have occurred, and the need for a stronger narrative that conveys the value of proactive mitigation.

The afternoon session, led by Erin Tassell, DBCA Fire Aviation Manager, focused on integrated capability. Presenters from DFES, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, NAFI, the Bureau of Meteorology and Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation outlined initiatives aimed at strengthening workforce development, improving knowledge exchange and enhancing operational tools. The session demonstrated the sector's commitment to building and maintaining a capable and adaptable workforce.

The final session of the day addressed risk management in bushfire mitigation activities. Facilitated by Glen Daniel, DFES Director Office of Bushfire Risk Management, the panel discussion brought together representatives from the Insurance Commission WA, Wespine, Sandalwest and DFES. The panel explored organisational approaches to risk assessment, assurance processes, insurance considerations and the balance between mitigation outcomes and competing priorities. The discussion provided valuable insights into how risk is interpreted and managed across different industries.

The day concluded with a brief reflection session before participants attended a networking dinner, offering an opportunity to strengthen professional relationships and continue discussions informally.

Day Two – Thursday 6 August

The second day commenced with opening remarks from John Tillman, followed by a session on planned fire research facilitated by Chris Dunne, DFES Policy Manager Office of Bushfire Risk Management. Presenters from DBCA and Forest Fire Management Victoria outlined current research priorities, including fire behaviour modelling, ecological outcomes, community perceptions and operational effectiveness. The session reinforced the essential role of research in informing policy, planning and operational decision-making.

Insights from Forest Fire Management Victoria's recent public sentiment survey of more than 1000 participants further highlighted this point, showing strong community support for fuel management activities and high levels of agreement regarding their importance. While smoke impacts, particularly when affecting Melbourne, remain a concern, improved communication has contributed to a clearer public understanding of why fuel management is undertaken and the benefits it provides.

Attention then shifted to the topic of social licence. In an introductory session facilitated by AFAC Executive Director National Capability Sandra Whight, and supported by a presentation from DBCA Fire Coordinator Blackwood District Ed Hatherley, participants examined the importance of trust, transparency and communication in maintaining public confidence in



planned burning. The subsequent workshop provided an interactive environment for exploring strategies to strengthen social licence, address misinformation and improve community engagement. The session generated considerable discussion and highlighted the increasing relevance of social licence to operational planning.

After lunch, the forum focused on cultural burning. Facilitated by the DFES Cultural Fire Program, presenters from the Kimberley Land Council, Town of Victoria Park and Wheatbelt NRM shared examples of cultural fire practice and partnership. The session emphasised the significance of cultural fire in contemporary land management and the need for genuine collaboration with Traditional Owners to support culturally informed approaches.

The final thematic session, facilitated by John Tillman, examined how planned burning can be used to manage landscape values. Presenters from DFES, Wagyl Kaip Southern Noongar Aboriginal Corporation and AFAC discussed the integration of biodiversity, cultural heritage, grazing and other land management considerations into planned burning programs. The session highlighted the importance of integrated planning and the need for flexible, place-based approaches.

The forum concluded with a closing session led by Trevor Howard, who summarised key themes and insights from across the two days. Participants identified priorities for future collaboration, capability development and sector-wide improvement. Outcomes and notes from the workshop sessions were digitised and shared with attendees. These insights may provide valuable intelligence that can help shape future knowledge products and inform training priorities.

Overall the forum was well-received, with participants noting the value of cross-agency engagement, the diversity of perspectives represented and the relevance of the topics discussed. The program structure supported both strategic reflection and practical knowledge sharing.

The DFES Bushfire Centre of Excellence would like to thank all attendees for their participation, and ongoing efforts to continually strengthen bushfire management.

Watch the [video](#) to see highlights of the Forum.

