

Recommendations for Local Government following the reports ‘A Shared Responsibility’ (Report of the Perth Hills Bush Fire February 2011) and ‘Appreciating the Risk’ (Report into the Margaret River Bush Fire November 2011)

A Shared Responsibility (Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011) – Recommendations concerning Local Government

- Local Government recognise the work of the Gas Technical Regulatory Council and ensure any amendments to the Australian Standard are enforced. Local Government provide information to residents on any changes to the Australian Standard relating to tethering gas tanks and encourage property owners to take action to comply with the Standard
- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority, in partnership with local governments, conduct more focused pre-season bushfire education, which emphasises:-
 - Water supply is not guaranteed during a bushfire
 - Power supply is not guaranteed during a bushfire
 - Saving life will be a priority over saving property so expect to be evacuated
 - Once evacuated, access to affected areas may not be possible for several days
 - Water “bombing” by aircraft cannot guaranteed in bushfire
 - SMS warnings are advice only and may not be timely
- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) review its distribution of information material, including *Prepare. Act. Survive*. FESA should also consider including the community in pre-season exercising, in consultation with the Department for Child Protection and local governments.
- Local governments continue to include information on bushfire risk and preparedness with rates notices
- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority work in partnership with Mains roads Western Australia and local governments to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for the use of mobile variable message boards to alert the community to the declaration of a total fire ban and what it means
- The State Government considers resourcing the Department of Environment and Conservation and local governments to develop and administer a comprehensive prescribes burning program in Perth’s urban/rural interface to compliment DEC’s existing landscape – scale program

- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the Department of Environment and Conservation and local government's take proactive steps to conduct their prescribed burning programs as joint exercises. This will give effect to:
 - Reduced fuel load
 - Improving inter-operability
 - A mutual understanding of the fire techniques of each agency.

The Fire and Emergency Services Authority and local governments ensure that the ability to:

- Measure and map fuel loads
- Maintain fuel loads databases
- Draw up prescriptions for, and oversee controlled burns

Are included as key competencies in any future recruitment of Chief Bushfire Control Officers and Community and Emergency Services Managers.

- Local governments consider increasing the number of green waste collections carried out each year to encourage a more proactive approach to property (and vegetation) maintenance by residents
- The Western Australian Local Government Association explore the feasibility of local governments utilising aerial and satellite imagery to monitor firebreaks and fuel loads on private property
- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the Department of Environment and Conservation and local governments jointly develop a single, integrated system for fuel load assessment and management. The system should enable public access to allow members of the community to access information about the fuel load in a given locality.
- Main Roads Western Australia undertake more frequent examinations of its bridges located in areas prone to bushfire and ensure that the risk proposed to loss of infrastructure in fire is understood by local authorities
- Hazard Management Agencies overseeing the response to incidents on the urban fringe select evacuation centres that are well within the urban environment and unlikely to be impacted by the incident
- Local governments institute a comprehensive program to assess fuel loads and bushfire preparedness on private properties. The program should give reference to the creation and maintenance of a Building Protection Zone, in line with FESA guidelines. This program should be implemented and managed under the *Bush Fires Act 1954* in a manner similar to the fire break inspection program.
- State and local governments:
 - Recognise that regardless of future declarations of bushfires prone areas, the existing planning and building problems in the Perth Hills related to bushfire risk will persist;
 - Urge residents in these areas to retrofit their homes and evaporative air conditioners in compliance with AS3959-2009;
 - Examine options to retrospectively bring these areas into compliance with *Planning for Bushfire Protection Guidelines*.

- Emergency service agencies undertake more consultation and joint exercising involving the Fire Emergency Services Authority, the Department of Environment, the Western Australian Police, the Department for Child Protection, local governments and volunteers – including Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades

This should include field exercises which test:

- Evacuation centres
- Critical Infrastructure (including at the local level)
- Traffic Management, including road blocks

Consideration should also be given to the community in exercising (see Recommendation 7) and using prescribed burns as exercises (see Recommendation 14)

- More detailed planning for exercises should be included in a revised WESTPLAN-BUSHFIRE to be endorsed by the State Emergency Committee
- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority and local governments ensure that Community Emergency Service Managers are physically based in local government.
- The Fire and Emergency Services Authority and local governments examine the current competencies of Chief Bushfire Control Officers and Community Emergency Services Managers (or Community Fire Managers) and consider what further development is needed to ensure these staff are capable of:
 - Measuring and mapping fuel loads
 - Maintaining fuel load databases
 - Drawing up prescriptions for; and overseeing controlled burns
 - Building effective working relationships with all relevant stakeholders

Appreciating the Risk (Report of the Special Inquiry into the November 2011 Margaret River Bushfire) – Recommendations concerning Local Government

While the recommendations are directed at the Department of Environment and Conservation (as the land which was subject to the Bush Fire was under their management) the City of Greater Geraldton should take note of the following and implement similar for the local area as there are considerable areas of conservation bushland (such as the Chapman River Regional Park) that the City of Greater Geraldton manages; similar expectations will be placed on the City and the City of Greater Geraldton would have been expected to have read and considered the recommendations of the report.

Recommendation 1

The Department of Environment and Conservation review its current policies and operational guidelines in particular by:

- strengthening the governance of operations by ensuring the Guidelines are relevant and practical;
- ensuring the processes that are implemented for prescribed burns are:
 - (a) Value adding to the decisions and approvals required
 - (b) Informed by substantive input
 - (c) Focussed on outcome rather than process;

- Completing the draft management plan for the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Capes Area Parks and Reserves in accordance with the provisions of the *Conservation and Land*

Management Act 1989;

- Exploring the possibility of automating and streamlining the various processes for formulating a prescription for prescribed burns for ease of access and updating; and
- Clarifying the guidance provided to decision makers as to the 'edging' and security of prescribed burns.

Recommendation 2

The Department of Environment and Conservation urgently undertake a review of its risk management practices as they relate to prescribed burns including but not limited to:

- Reviewing risk management practices to ensure that they are in accordance with AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009;
- Finalising and implementing the new complexity model developed in house by the DEC;
- Considering a broader set of parameters of risk by conducting an environmental scan or similar tool for areas under consideration for a prescribed burn;
- Updating the prescribed fire plans to reflect the broader risk considerations discovered through environmental scanning;
- Better informing the risk considerations by updating the 'Red Book' to reflect current research on burning in coastal heath; and
- Reconsidering the utility of the 'Red Flag Burn' notification on files and either adopting it as a policy across the State or removing it as a consideration.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Environment and Conservation review its implementation of the findings of the Ferguson Review conducted in 2010.

Recommendation 4

The Department of Environment and Conservation be supported to conduct further research into the fuel management of coastal heath in the south west of Western Australia exploring alternatives to burning as well as best practice for burning.

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Recommendation 5

The Department of Environment and Conservation explore human resourcing models that:

- Make succession planning a priority;
- Look at options for the attraction and retention of staff; and
- Review how the salary levels of staff matches the decision making required in major activities such as prescribed burns.

Recommendation 6

The Department of Environment and Conservation review its practices and procedures in the undertaking of prescribed burns so as to fully utilise the skills available to it in a seamless way including but not limited to:

- Volunteer bushfire brigades, especially in regard to use as a source of local advice
- Staff of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Environment and Conservation review the utility of its current regional model in terms of the capability of operational centres such as Kirup to service major fire activity on land proximate to the rural urban area (this recommendation should also be considered in the context of Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 8

The Department of Environment and Conservation develop and implement a strategy to better inform the community about the complexities and decisions

References:

Keelty, M. J.(2011), A Shared Responsibility *The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review*, Government of Western Australia, available online:
http://sharedservices.servicenet.wa.gov.au/bushfire/Perth_Hills_Bushfire_Report_Feb_2011.pdf

Keelty, M. J. (2012), Appreciating the Risk *Report of the Special Inquiry into the 2011 Margaret River Bushfire*, Government of Western Australia, available online:
http://www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/inquiry_-_margaret_river_bushfire_-_report_-_appreciating_the_risk_with_annexures.pdf