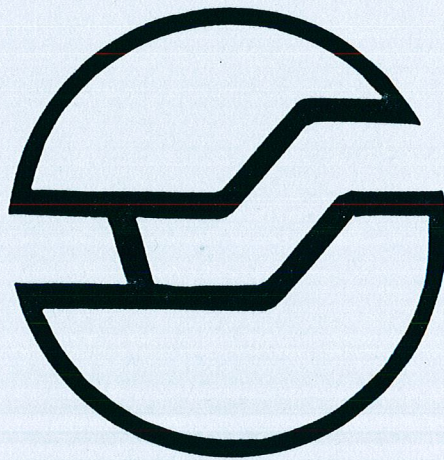


FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT 19



**Conservation and
Land Management**

MAY 1987

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

POLICY STATEMENT NO. 19

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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy is based upon the following premises:

- 1.1 Fire has occurred naturally from time to time in practically all lands managed by CALM. Fire has therefore played some part in determining present vegetation structures and composition.
- 1.2 Under natural conditions, practically all ecosystems are made up of a mosaic of vegetation associations and structural stages according to their fire histories. The scale of the mosaic varies in different ecosystems.
- 1.3 Fires from natural causes (eg. lightning) will inevitably occur. Fires resulting from human activities, either deliberate or accidental will also occur, but may be minimised by effective public education and awareness, and by legislation.
- 1.4 In Western Australia, weather conditions occur every year under which fires can be so intense as to be impossible to contain with currently available technologies and resources. Such fires can threaten human lives, and resources valued by the community, and their control involves considerable public expenditure and risks to fire-fighters.
- 1.5 The speed and intensity at which fire burns is related to the quantity of accumulated dry litter or other fine plant material. In some ecosystems, or in some high risk/high value situations, accumulated fuel loads can be reduced by prescribed burning. This reduces the likelihood of intense fires even under extreme conditions, and improves the capacity for fire-fighters to safely control a fire.

Within each major fuel type there is a recognised weight of dry fuel above which fire-fighting forces are not likely to be able to contain wildfires burning under normal hot summer conditions.

- 1.6 Much of departmental land, particularly in the south west, has a common boundary with well developed private assets such as towns and farms, the protection of which reduces the flexibility for fire management.

- 1.7 Information about the long term effects of different fire regimes, including fire exclusion on many ecosystems is limited, and any management policy must be under constant review and accompanied by research and monitoring programmes.
- 1.8 The Department has a moral and legal obligation to comply with those provisions of the Bush Fires Act, and CALM Act relating to fire prevention and control of wildfires on or near CALM lands.

2. OBJECTIVES

The fire management goal of the Department of Conservation and Land Management is:

- 2.1 To protect community and environmental values on lands managed by the Department from damage or destruction from wildfire.
- 2.2 To use fire as a management tool to achieve land management objectives, in accordance with designated land use priorities.

3. POLICY

3.1 Fire Suppression

1. The Department will meet its legal obligations under the Bush Fires Act and Conservation and Land Management Act by responding to fires occurring on or near CALM land to a degree that is appropriate to the values at risk.
2. The Department will assess its response to a fire in the light of potential damage to the following values in order of priority.
 - (i) Human life;
 - (ii) Community assets, property or special values (including environmental values);
 - (iii) Cost of suppression in relation to values threatened.
3. Where values dictate the Department will:
 - (i) provide a detection system which will give timely warning of the presence of a fire threatening community or environmental values;

- (ii) provide a well trained and equipped suppression organisation capable of containing several simultaneous unplanned fires under extreme weather conditions in conjunction with other fire fighting organisations.

3.2 Use of Fire

The Department will:

1. Use planned fire only where this use is in accordance with an approved management plan, or, where such a plan does not exist, to protect and maintain the designated priority land use.
2. Prepare written prescriptions in advance, for approval by senior designated officers, before any planned fires are undertaken.
3. For areas where primary land use is wildlife conservation, use fire in such a way as to promote the greatest possible diversity and variety of habitats within prevailing physical or financial constraints.

In small conservation reserves and where information on the impact of fire is limited, fire will be used conservatively. In such areas the use of fire will be restricted to:

- (i) protection of neighbouring community assets; and
 - (ii) as far as is achievable and within safe limits, ensuring that different seral stages following fire are represented.
4. Use prescribed fire or other methods to reduce fuels on appropriate areas of CALM lands, where it can be demonstrated that this is the most effective means of wildfire control, and where undesirable ecological effects do not result.

The frequency of fuel reduction measures will be governed by the rate of build-up of fuels; the degree of risk to human lives, the value of the assets to be protected; the known sensitivity to fire, or dependence on fire, of the kinds of plants and animals present; and the resources available to carry out the work.

3.3 Liaison

The Department will:

1. Ensure effective liaison with neighbours, Bush Fires Brigades, Shires, Bush Fires Board and other fire control organisations.
2. Support the concept of Shire District Fire Plans and promote mutual aid interagency agreements for fire control on lands of mixed tenure with common fire problems.

3.4 Public Awareness

The Department will provide for public education in relation to the prevention of fire, and the role and use of fire in ecosystem management, and hazard and risk reduction.

3.5 Research

The Department will undertake research into fire prevention and control, fire ecology and fire behaviour on CALM lands to improve the scientific basis for, and effectiveness of Fire Management Programmes.

4. STRATEGIES

4.1 Fire Suppression

Suppression of unplanned fires on or threatening departmental land will be given priority over normal activities, except for those involved with safeguarding human life.

A detection system based on aircraft, lookout towers or ground patrol, will be used in designated areas where early warning of a fire occurrence is essential to enable rapid control measures.

In other areas, the Department will rely on neighbours, staff presence, the public, or commercial aircraft for reports of fire outbreaks.

When a fire is detected an appreciation will be made to estimate its likely spread and potential to cause damage to life, property or environmental value.

Unplanned fires will be contained to the smallest possible area by the most appropriate means available taking into consideration the values at risk and the impact of the suppression activity on the environment.

4.2 Use of Fire

Prescribed fires will be used to achieve a range of management objectives, including fuel reduction, habitat management, forest regeneration and the management of scenic values.

According to management objectives, appropriate prescriptions will be developed, and staff will be trained in their application.

Monitoring of the effects of fires will be undertaken wherever effective systems have been developed and resources are available.

4.3 Liaison

The Department will participate in the preparation and implementation of Shire District Fire Plans and interagency agreements.

Departmental staff will attend Bush Fire Advisory Committees and Brigade meetings where appropriate, to foster and encourage good working relationships with other fire fighting organisations.

Where practical, departmental staff will assist with fire control activities on a neighbour to neighbour basis with local Bush Fire Brigades and other fire control organisations.

4.4 Public Awareness

Education of the public on the prevention of wildfire and on the use and role of planned fires will be promoted through the provision of literature, films and talks. Special attention will be directed towards school groups.

4.5 Research

The Department will undertake research and will encourage research by other agencies and institutions into the fields of:

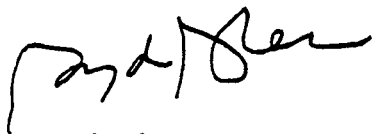
1. Fire behaviour in major vegetation types;
2. Fire ecology;
3. Fire equipment development;
4. The application of information technology to fire management;
5. Fire detection, prevention and suppression systems;
6. Remote sensing for fire mapping and detection purposes;

7. Alternative methods of fuel reduction;
8. Social aspects of fire prevention and arson.

4.6 Operations-Research Interface

The Department will ensure that there is a rapid transmission of research results into policy and operations. Research and specialist staff will help to develop and update operational prescriptions and monitoring systems.

The Department will sponsor relationships between its staff and other agencies or organisations concerned about fire by the publication of research findings, holding workshops and seminars, and public participation in management plans.



Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

26 May 1987

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