

Department of Conservation and Land Management

**FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY,
RESPONSIBILITIES, RESOURCING AND ISSUES**



Presentation to Spinifex Grasslands Fire Management Workshop

**Alan Walker
Director Regional Services**

18 November 2004



Fire Management Policy, Responsibilities, Resourcing and Issues

Policy

- Government Policy
- Opposition Policy
- Bushfire Inquiries – National and State
- CALM's Draft Fire Management Policy

Responsibilities

- CALM-managed lands
- Unallocated Crown land and Unmanaged Reserves



Fire Management Policy, Responsibilities, Resourcing and Issues

Resourcing

- Budget increases 2003/04–2007/08 and ongoing
- New Cabinet Submission

Issues

- Smoke management
- CALM's workforce
- Incident management – command and control on other than CALM-managed lands



GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Government strongly supports prescribed burning as the primary fire protection strategy for biodiversity values, private and public assets and rural communities in the south-west.

**Dr Judy Edwards
Minister for the Environment**

February 2003



The Department of Conservation and Land Management will work to step up its prescribed burning activities in the face of a potentially serious summer bushfire season.

Environment Minister Dr Judy Edwards said she had asked the Department to complete as much of its proposed burning program as possible in the northern and central forest areas during November.

Dr Edwards said the program would continue in the southern forests into December as conditions became more suitable for planned burns.

“Although the Department has an annual planned burning program of about 200,000 ha, in three out of the past four years it has achieved less than 50 per cent of this target,” she said

12 November 2002



“This accelerated program will be vital if we are to have the strategic buffers throughout the forest to minimise extended fire runs in the event of wildfires.

“Research by the Department and other agencies – such as CSIRO – has repeatedly demonstrated there is a high correlation between fire intensity and the available fuel loadings.

“There also is a similar correlation between the speed at which a forest fire travels and fuel loading.

Consequently, by controlling the fuel loadings, land managers and fire authorities will have a better chance of minimising the potential damage to property and community assets, as well as conservation values

12 November 2002



Dr Edwards said the Government recognised accelerating the burning program might result in some short-term smoke impacts in built-up areas.

“Smoke management is a limiting factor in the Department’s prescribed burning operations,” she said.

“While I expect the Department to continue to incorporate smoke management guidelines in its prescribed burning operations, there may be periods over the next few weeks when smoke or haze will impact on the metropolitan area.”

Dr Edwards said she had asked the Department to monitor the burning program closely and to provide advance warnings to the public in the event of haze or other smoke impacts.

12 November 2002



The Government supports the use of planned burning to achieve biodiversity and protection outcomes, and has provided additional funds to ensure that the Department has sufficient resources to achieve the planned burning program.

I ask the House to join me in commending the efforts of the Department's fire crews.

Dr Judy Edwards
Minister for the Environment

Statement to Parliament
8 May 2003



Members may remember that last December, the Government announced the allocation of an additional \$3 million to CALM for fire management in the 2003-04 financial year. This allocation has been a significant factor in allowing CALM to achieve its targets through the employment of additional seasonal personnel. That additional funding was provided in response to concerns that the backlog of burning programs in the south-west was increasing and that there could be a significant risk to communities and environmental values. In further recognition of the need to protect property, community assets and biological values from the ravages of wildfires, the Government is allocating an additional \$24.3 million to CALM over the next four years for fire management. Additional funding for 2004-05 is \$3.6 million, with extra funding of \$5.6 million in 2005-06 and \$7.6 million a year in the following years.

2 June 2004



The additional funding that the Government is providing to CALM and the development of new technology will assist CALM in placing a greater emphasis on managing fire for ecological purposes, as well as helping to protect human life, private property and community assets.

Dr Judy Edwards
Minister for the Environment

Statement to Parliament
2 June 2004



OPPOSITION POLICY



Motion

Mr P.D. Omodei (Warren-Blackwood): On behalf of the members for Vasse, I move –

That this House calls upon the Government to accept that –

- (a) fire is a natural part of Western Australia's environment;
- (b) fire is an essential management tool in virtually all WA ecosystems;
- (c) the exclusion of all fire from natural areas, as supported by some environmentalists, poses serious threats to life, property and environmental values if implemented; and
- (d) adequate funding for the appropriate use of fire as an environmental management and hazard reduction tool must be provided as a high budget priority.



CALM does not have the resources to burn large areas. It can burn only a certain amount with the number of staff it has. Some of the reasons for the reduction in controlled burning over the past four years has been smoke management, unusual weather – including dry winters

I am gravely concerned about the future of our forests, particularly in the wake of this Government's decision on forest management in Western Australia. The Government needs to make a conscious decision to place significantly more resources into fire control and prescribed burning in Western Australia.

Mr P.D. Omodei
Member for Warren-Blackwood
6 November 2002



If the prescribed burning is not done and the risk is not minimised, there is an element of negligence on the part of the Government of the day and the people responsible for making decisions. CALM burnt 75,000 hectares last year and 88,000 hectares the year before; that is, in 2000-01. That is way down on the 174,000 hectares burnt in 1999-2000. My understanding is that CALM usually burns about 2000 hectares a year

Colin Barnett
Member for Cottesloe
6 November 2002



I am not apportioning personal blame. The level of burning over recent years has been too low. I hope we get through this summer without a fire. The Minister needs to ensure that prescribed burning is undertaken at an accelerated level.

If it causes haze across Perth, the Minister will have our support. We will support the Government on the issue of air quality around Perth. We recognise it will cause discomfort to some people. The Minister will not find members on this side of the House criticising the Government for undertaking prescribed burning.

Colin Barnett
Member for Cottesloe
6 November 2002



POSITION STATEMENT

Parliamentary Liberal Party

Bushfire Management in Western Australia

2004

In recent years, however, the system that has protected Western Australia from serious bushfires for over 40 years has fallen into decline. In terms of area burnt by wildfire, 2003 was the worst fire season in south-west Western Australia since 1961. Property losses from fire are now increasing. In the forest, the effect of a recent decline in fuel reduction burning by CALM, and of reduced fire fighting resources is being seen. Some destructive wildfires have occurred, for example at Bridgetown, Walpole, Tenterden and Mt Cooke. This trend must be reversed



POSITION STATEMENT

Parliamentary Liberal Party

Bushfire Management in Western Australia

2004

The Liberal Party believes that bushfire mitigation and prevention measures go hand in hand with effective fire fighting measures. Under severe weather conditions and with heavy fuels, wildfires are impossible to control. Since it is the relatively large wildfires that cause most damage, any fire management system must be designed to minimise the potential damage from such events.

An integrated approach to fire management is necessary, one that maintains combustible fuels at a low level, and also maintains a fire combat system that can promptly and effectively deal with fires while they are small.



POSITION STATEMENT

Parliamentary Liberal Party

Bushfire Management in Western Australia

2004

Prescribed burning

The report of the House of Representatives Select Committee, *A National Charred – Inquiry into the recent Australian Bushfires* (October 2003) concluded that a lack of fuel reduction burning was a significant factor in the severity of the bushfires that devastated the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and New South Wales in 2002 and 2003. The report called for a planned scientifically-based fuel management strategy.

The CSIRO believes that prescribed burning is the most ecologically sound and cost effective way to manage fuel loads



POSITION STATEMENT

Parliamentary Liberal Party

Bushfire Management in Western Australia

2004

Given the prescribed burning can only take place on a limited number of days, it is important that CALM is in a position to take best possible advantage of ideal prescribed burning conditions to meet its prescribed burning targets. By having the best available knowledge of all the interactions of all elements – fuel, terrain, fuel ignition pattern, time of day and weather – it may be possible to extend the number of days suitable for prescribed burning.

A Liberal Government will investigate the extension of the number of days on which prescribed burning can take place by implementing a better formulation of the interaction between these elements.



POSITION STATEMENT

Parliamentary Liberal Party Bushfire Management in Western Australia 2004

Increased fuel loads on CALM-managed land

Over the last five years, the area of prescribed burning carried out by CALM in south-west forest regions, has averaged under 150,000 hectares a year, despite 200,000 hectares being the accepted annual target. This is a significant decline in prescribed burning levels prior to 1997 which were between 200,000 and 300,000 hectares and gave a proven level of protection.

A Liberal Government will require CALM to restore its prescribed burning program to acceptable levels, based on a full scientific analysis of effective targets and provide CALM with the necessary resources to meet these targets.



A Nation Charred: Inquiry Into the Recent Australian Bushfires

October 2003

House of Representatives Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires

59 Recommendations – few relate to arid or semi arid ecosystems

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth seek to ensure that the Council of Australian Governments seek agreement from the States and Territories on the optimisation and implementation of prescribed burning targets and programs to a degree that is recognised as adequate for the protection of life, property and the environment. The prescribed burning programs should include strategic evaluation of fuel management at the regional level and the results of annual fuel management in each State should be publicly reported and audited.



A Nation Charred: Inquiry Into the Recent Australian Bushfires

October 2003

House of Representatives Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre conduct further research into the long term effects and effectiveness of grazing as a fire mitigation practice.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre conduct further research on the impact of weeds on the flammability of land and the most economically and environmentally appropriate way to remove weeds after fire events.



National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management

Council of Australian Governments
March 2004

29 Recommendations

6.4.4 Risk Modification

There is compelling evidence to show that a reduction in fuel loads in bushland environments will reduce fire intensity and modify fire behaviour. This is the only cost effective way to achieve fuel reduction in large areas of the landscape.



National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management

Council of Australian Governments
March 2004

Inappropriate Fire Regimes and Biodiversity

Inappropriate fire regimes have been recognised as potentially threatening to the conservation of biodiversity.

The National Land and Water Resources Audit noted that changed fire regimes threaten ecosystems across Australia and are one of the principal threats in northern Australia. The national *State of the Environment Report 2001* highlighted the deleterious effects of inappropriate fire regimes on native species, especially in the arid and semi-arid rangelands. *The Action Plan for Birds 2000* estimated that altered fire regimes affect 45 per cent of mainland bird species.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recently identified 15 national biodiversity “hot spots” – regions of Australia that are rich in biodiversity but also under immediate threat – as priorities for funding. For 10 of these 15 regions, altered fire regimes and/or threat from bushfires is listed as a key threatening process adversely affecting the biodiversity of the region.



National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management

Council of Australian Governments
March 2004

Indigenous Australians' use of fire

Recommendation 6.4

The Inquiry recommends that fire agencies, land managers and researchers continue to work in partnership with Indigenous Australians to explore how traditional burning practices and regimes can be integrated with modern practices and technologies and so enhance bushfire mitigation and management in current Australian landscapes.



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

Environmental Protection Authority Bulletin 1151
October 2004

9 Recommendations

4.1.1 Fuel Reduction

There is a degree of dispute in the community on the value of prescribed burns for reducing fuels. This may stem from data which indicate there is no reduction in the number of wildfires as a consequence of prescribed burns. The value is not in reducing the number of wildfires, but rather in reducing the intensity and increasing the prospects of suppressing them, and of reducing the damage they cause to biodiversity values and to property.

It is the EPA's view that CALM's fuel reduction program is imperative to reduce the extent of the damage caused by wildfires to biodiversity and other assets, while recognising that prescribed burns may also affect biodiversity.



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

Environmental Protection Authority Bulletin 1151
October 2004

Other Advice

5.5. Fire management in other regions of ecological importance in the State

The review has encompassed only three CALM administrative regions, in the south west of the State. There have been calls for the EPA to broaden its brief to consider other areas, such as the eastern agricultural areas, the Pilbara and the Kimberley. The EPA recognises that there are serious fire management issues that should be addressed in other parts of the State, especially in the Pilbara and Kimberley areas, but to have done so would have greatly extended the terms of reference for this study, taken much more time and would have been outside of the terms of reference of the review. The EPA considers that CALM should, as a matter of urgency, review fire management procedures in these other areas and report its findings and recommendations to the Minister.



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

Draft Policy (February 2004)

- Released for public comment 27 February 2004 for 2 months
- Advertisements in State and local newspapers
 - Distributed to key stakeholders
 - Posted on CALM's NatureBase website
- 25 submissions received



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

Objective

The Department will manage prescribed fire and wildfires on the lands managed by the Department to protect and promote the conservation of biodiversity and natural values whilst also providing for a sufficient level of protection to human life, community assets and fire sensitive ecosystems. The Department will also promote fire management that protects biodiversity on lands not managed by the Department.



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

Objective

Fire management will be planned and implemented in partnership with other land owners and land managers, fire authorities and with the community. The Department will implement an informed and balanced approach to risk management. A variety of fire regimes incorporating different frequency, intensity, season and scale will be applied at the landscape scale on lands vested in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

5.1 Use of fire

Prescribed burning plans will incorporate both nature conservation and protection objectives in order to optimise outcomes. The planning of prescribed burning will require the integration of multiple objectives and must take into account the role of planned fire in the maintenance of biodiversity (for example, by timing burning to achieve regeneration) and reducing the risk of wildfire (for example, by reducing fuel loads).



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

5.1 Use of fire

Planning for prescribed burns will incorporate the need to address strategic protection from large fires, as well as landscape scale and land management unit scale (several hundred to several thousand hectares) plans that provide for the protection and conservation requirements at each of these levels.



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

5.1 Use of fire

During the planning process for prescribed burning the Department will consult with traditional owners, the community and specific stakeholders regarding the Master Burn Plan, fire regimes for the conservation of biodiversity, the scope of the proposed burning program, individual burns and burning methods, road and track maintenance and other fuel management treatments. Fire management will also be considered during public consultation on the content of area management plans prepared for the Conservation Commission. Consultation processes will also be used as an opportunity to develop community understanding and support for fire management programs



Review of the Fire Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management

CALM's Fire Management Policy

5.1 Use of fire

Prescribed burns will be managed to reduce the risk of smoke causing detrimental impacts on population centres and other sensitive areas through the application of smoke management guidelines. Potential impacts of smoke and ash on water catchments, road traffic, neighbours and visitors, and firefighters will be considered when planning and implementing prescribed burns.



CALM's Fire Management Policy

Rationale

- Fires have occurred regularly on most lands managed by the Department. Fires from natural causes (eg. lightning) will inevitably occur. Fires from human activities, either deliberate or accidental, will also occur, but unplanned fires may be minimised by effective public education and awareness, and by enforcement of legislation and compliance management. (Refer Policy 5.1, 5.3.)
- Aboriginal people have inhabited Western Australia for more than 40,000 years and over this period they have used fire as a management tool for hunting, access and spiritual reasons. The landscapes that European settlers and their descendants have come to recognise as being distinctively Australian have been fashioned by fire over many generations. (Refer Policy 5.1, 6.)
- Fire has very different impacts on the biota contained in the twenty-six bioregions represented in Western Australia. Fire regimes must be appropriate to the needs of each bioregion. (Refer Policy 5.1.)



CALM's Fire Management Policy

Principles for Fire Management

13 principles (adapted from Burrows and Abbott, 2003)



CALM's Fire Management Responsibilities

- CALM-managed lands
- UCL
- Other lands



Fire Management Resourcing

Allocation of additional Fire Management Budgets 2003/04 to 2007/08

	\$M				
Region/CC	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Swan	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.250	1.250
South West	0.840	0.810	0.910	1.100	1.100
Warren	0.750	0.780	0.880	1.100	1.100
South Coast	0.183	0.180	0.350	0.550	0.550
Midwest	0.183	0.180	0.350	0.550	0.550
Wheatbelt			0.200	0.260	0.260
Goldfields			0.300	0.480	0.480
Pilbara			0.300	0.480	0.480
Kimberley			0.300	0.480	0.480
Fire Mgmt Services	0.030	0.050	0.170	0.540	0.540
Science			0.140	0.140	0.140
TOTAL	2.986	3.000	5.000	6.930	6.930

Fire Management Resourcing

Cabinet Submission – November 2004

Requested funds	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08 (ongoing)
	\$5.6 m	\$10.4 m	\$9.2 m	\$9.9 m

Justification

- Appropriate funding level for native forests
- Adequate level of trained/experienced staff in CALM
- CALM's capacity to deal with fire preparedness statewide
- Responding to the EPA's review (research scientists and technical officers, fire planners and operations staff)
- Fire protection of plantations



Issues

- Smoke management
- Incident management – command and control on other than CALM-managed lands
- CALM's workforce



THANK YOU

QUESTIONS PLEASE

