

Fire symposium adds to knowledge

THE outcomes of the three-day symposium on fire ecology and impacts will help the Department refine its fire management regimes for the State's conservation estate.

Director of Science Neil Burrows says the symposium provided a wealth of information that will help to conserve the State's distinctive biodiversity and protect conservation and community values from damage by wildfires.

The symposium was attended by 350 people including fire managers, fire fighters, academics, conservationists, local government representatives, farmers and interested members of the community.

The program of topics and speakers was prepared by the Department in consultation with representatives of the Conservation Council of Western Australia, the WA Forest Alliance and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority. Speakers were mainly from WA universities and Government agencies but included guest speakers

from eastern Australia and the United States.

Neil said the symposium aimed to collate and disseminate current scientific knowledge of fire behaviour and its effects on plants and animals in south-west ecosystems.

"But it also provided an opportunity for discussing a diverse range of social and community issues including perspectives from Nyoongar Aboriginal people, bushfire law, regional planning, the threat bushfires pose to communities and to human health and the contribution of bushfires to global warming," he said.

"Important findings that emerged from the presentations were that for thousands of years, fire, including the deliberate and skilful use of fire by Nyoongar people, has played an important role in moulding the distinctive ecosystems of the south-west.

"A common theme from the scientists was that no single fire regime benefits all wildlife species and communities.

"Rather, native plants and animals have evolved in a diversity of fire regimes over long periods of time so there needs to be greater variability of factors such as frequency, season, scale and intensity of fires to create a mosaic across the landscape that in turn will promote biodiversity.

"This means we need to be flexible in our approach to fire management – we need to avoid using the same fire management prescriptions over large areas for long periods to avoid undesirable impacts on biodiversity conservation."

The scientific papers presented at the symposium would be published as a book by an independent scientific publisher. Other papers are being collated and will be published in a separate volume.

Abstracts from the various papers are available on the Department's Science Division pages on NatureBase at www.naturebase.net/science/science.html

