

Local government submission to Bushfires Royal Commission

Bushfire Management in Victoria

- There is no single Act, regulation, policy or other instrument which comprehensively sets out Victoria's bushfire management regime
- The bushfire management regime is comprised of various pieces of legislation and policies covering emergency management, fire suppression, bushfire prevention planning, land management, roads, utilities, town planning, environment and conservation (among others)
- At least 20 stakeholders are involved in Victoria's approach to bushfire management
- It is a complex and complicated regime that lacks clarity about the roles of various stakeholders and the coordination of those roles, responsibilities and activities
- Legislation does not always recognise the need for fire prevention and protection measures
- There are competing priorities for vegetation conservation and fuel load reduction for bushfire management outlined in various Government acts, regulations and policies
- Victoria's native vegetation framework is complex and focuses on vegetation conservation. It does not recognise fire prevention and management as a priority.

About Local Government

- 27 of Victoria's 79 municipalities were impacted by the 2009 bushfires
- Each of Victoria's councils differs greatly in size, resources, rate base and community needs
- Councils have no inherent fire expertise and rely on the expertise of fire agencies such as DSE and CFA.

Bushfire Management Role of Councils

- Councils have roles in the various stages of bushfire *planning, prevention, response and recovery*
- Councils are largely a support agency where their role is facilitative. Councils administer and enforce State Government legislation and policies, as well as supporting the key emergency response agencies such as DSE, CFA and DHS in their response and recovery roles.
- Councils may also implement discretionary policies through instruments such as local laws and the adoption of State planning scheme controls such as overlays.

Key Policy Issues

- Key matters raised in the joint local government submission include:
 - Fire prevention planning
 - the new Integrated Fire Management Planning model and whether it will deliver greater clarity of roles, integration of agencies and a more consistent statewide approach
 - Building regulations and standards
 - planning scheme controls including the Wildfire Management Overlay
 - Native vegetation
 - Road management, including roadside vegetation
 - Fire refuges and evacuation
 - Fire response and recovery
- Other issues for consideration in the submission include:
 - requirements under the bushfire management regime lack statewide standards or guidance, leaving councils to interpret expectations, resources and priorities
 - the expertise of fire agencies such as DSE and CFA is required in order for councils to fulfill a number of legislated requirements
 - the ability of planning overlays to reduce potential fire risks.