



National Parks Association of the ACT Bushfire Management - Balancing the Risks

Friday 21 – Saturday 22 July 2017

Pilgrim House, 69 Northbourne Avenue,
Civic ACT 2601

A community symposium to discuss research, strategies and expectations for fire management in the ACT in a changing climate

Aim: an informed ACT community able to contribute positively to ACT government policy, goal setting and strategic directions of fire management

SYMPOSIUM COMMUNIQUÉ: FIRE MANAGEMENT – SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

CONTEXT

Over two days over 120 people gathered to discuss fire management. The Symposium was attended by a mix of experts, researchers, Government officials, the ACT Minister for Environment who is also Minister for Emergency Services, the Commissioner of the Emergency Services Agency, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Parkcare / landcare volunteers, rural leaseholders, members of the Rural Fire Service, Community Fire Units and environment organisations as well as visitors from Victoria and NSW. In addition it acted as an opportunity for knowledge sharing on information on research, fire planning processes, innovation more generally. It was a re-endorsement of the 2007 statement, especially in regard to finding the balance between protection of life, property and environment, whilst also recognising the changes and improvements over the last ten years.

Participants welcomed this event as the start of the process for community engagement on the next ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan which is due to be completed mid-2019.

A key theme was the importance of all residents accepting responsibility for fire prevention, mitigation and management.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 2003

- More recognition of the need for 'shared responsibility' for fire management, and increased focus for working in partnership
- Greater dialogue between a variety of interested stakeholders and the broader community
- Greater transparency – for instance all of the key bushfire planning documents are available publically
- Increased scientific basis of methodology informing fire management practices
- More processes that build common community values and understanding of bushfire, its risks and responsibilities for risk management
- Introduction of a cultural burns framework and practice
- Better awareness of climate change and the increasing risk of fire
- The development of a robust statutory fire management planning regime in the ACT and a
- Advances in technology and fire fighting tools
- Fading memories of the 2003 fire and new people living at urban edge
- There are changes across Australia following major fire events in most states.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Ongoing increased research / scientific base to inform operational bushfire management
- Greater understanding of the competing values and responses to fire management and wildfires
- Different areas of government are working better together in some areas of bushfire planning
- Building community resilience through shared understanding of varied impacts of bushfires
- More collaboration, integration, information sharing across the community.

CHALLENGES

- Research is being done but with lag in research timeframes to inform current bushfire management practices and communication of research to practitioners is not always effective
- Ongoing need to continue to break down bushfire management silos
- Reconciling new scientific insights with current bushfire practice and community expectations
- Integration of knowledge and strategies and communications between Community Fire Units, Parkcare groups, Parks Conservation Service, Emergency Services Agency and the broader community to build the shared responsibility
- Consistent terminology
- Trusting the community to be able to participate in planning and assessment of risk to build two way engagement eg around fuel hazard reduction
- Designing fire management to different ecosystems, species compositions and age classes
- Introducing bushfire building codes into established areas.

NEXT STEPS

- Design fire management suited to different ecosystems, species, compositions and age classes
- Build Climate resilience clearly into long-term bushfire planning processes
- Develop a clear outline of processes and timetable for community engagement well in advance of the next round of ACT Bushfire Planning which is due to be complete by mid-2019 – the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP), Regional Fire Management Plans (RFMP) and subsequent annual Bushfire Operational Plans (BOP)
- Create a dedicated community-based “fire in the environment” platform and network supported by the ACT Government
- The “fire in the environment” network would share references, resources, knowledge, activities, and research. For example:
 - provide a summary of the main points/ issues / paper from this symposium and the 2007 report.
 - organise follow-up events to facilitate the community connecting with each other and promote ongoing sharing and learning.
 - be actively involved in the forthcoming SBMP and RFMP processes.