

A BLUEPRINT FOR AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT

AUSTRALIA NEEDS A REVOLUTION IN BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT. THE BUSHFIRE FRONT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA HAS VAST EXPERIENCE IN, AND KNOWLEDGE OF BUSHFIRE SCIENCE, OPERATIONS AND POLITICS. THIS IS A SUMMARY OF OUR BLUEPRINT FOR AN EFFECTIVE BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR AUSTRALIA.

Essential Background Truths:

- 1. Australia's climate**, renowned for periodic drought and hot, dry summers, is conducive to the occurrence of bushfires.
- 2. Australia's vegetation is highly flammable**, dominated by plant species that ignite easily and burn fiercely.
- 3. Bushland fuels accumulate** and increasing fuel results in increasing fire intensity.
- 4. Fire prone ecosystems are adapted to fire** and there is no evidence that low intensity planned fire regimes cause any long term harm to biodiversity.
- 5. Fires will always be ignited every fire season** whether by humans (accidental or deliberate) or nature (lightning).
- 6. High intensity fires cannot be stopped** by firefighters if fuels are heavy and terrain is difficult.
- 7. Reducing bushland fuels** is by far the most effective weapon against killer bushfires.

Seven Critical Elements Of An Effective Bushfire Management System (BMS):

- 1. Leadership.** Clear-headed leaders are needed to devise policy, assign priorities, build capacity, fight for budgets, oversee outcomes, and ensure system feedback and correction. They will insist on proactive, rather than responsive bushfire management.
- 2. Consistent policy.** All levels of government and all agencies must accept that prevention of bushfire damage is a key priority, over-riding all other land management and environmental policies.
- 3. Prevention and mitigation of bushfire damage.** There must be significant investment in mitigating bushfire damage and in preparing communities and bushland in the expectation of fire. Reducing bushfire fuels through a well-planned, science-based prescribed burning program, with, for example 8% of bushland treated annually, is the fundamental underpinning of a BMS. "Prevention is better than cure".
- 4. Firefighting capability.** An effective BMS demands the maintenance of efficient fire detection, good bush access, rapid response from well-trained and equipped firefighters, a managed collaboration between land management and fire response agencies, and the capacity to call on experienced, trained incident teams to command firefighting operations and to fight fires.
- 5. Bushfire-resilient communities.** Local Government Authorities must develop tenure-blind risk management plans that identify threats and priorities, and measures to reduce risks and threats. Fuel age plans must be publicly available. Implementation of the plans will use funds raised through the Emergency Services Levy, with all landowners required to comply.
- 6. Economic and financial decision-making.** State Treasuries will ensure that taxpayers' money is spent where it will do the most good, i.e. in the prevention of bushfire disasters rather than dealing with them after the event. Cost/benefit analyses will be used to inform decision-makers about alternative approaches and technologies.
- 7. Promotion of excellence.** Continuous improvement through investment in recruitment, mentoring, training, education and bushfire research is essential. Young people need constantly to be brought into bushfire operations, absorbing appropriate culture and gaining practical experience and an understanding of bushfire science.