

STATE BUSH FIRE PLAN

A Sub Plan of the NSW Emergency
Management Plan

2023



Authorisation

The State Bush Fire Plan is a Sub Plan to the State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) to detail control and coordination arrangements for prevention of, preparation for, response to, and initial recovery from, significant bush fire activity in New South Wales.

This Sub Plan maintained by the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and was last endorsed by the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC), in accordance with the provisions of the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (as amended), on 28 July 2023.

Distribution

This Sub Plan is not distributed in hard copy. Organisations and individuals should confirm they have the latest copy by checking the current version at www.emergency.nsw.gov.au.

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Introduction

The State Bush Fire Plan, (the Plan) is a Sub Plan of, and is to be read in conjunction with the State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN). The Plan is developed under the *State Emergency & Rescue Management Act 1989* (SERM Act 1989), and the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is identified in the EMPLAN and *Rural Fires Act 1997* as having the lead role in responding to bush fires, and activities in relation to bush fires across New South Wales (NSW), including Lord Howe Island. The RFS Commissioner has oversight of co-ordinated bush fire firefighting activities and may take charge of operations anywhere in the State when conditions dictate.

The RFS is responsible for the response to and management of fires in rural fire districts, under the provisions of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, with Fire Rescue NSW (FRNSW) responsible for fires within fire districts, as prescribed in the *Fire and Rescue Act 1989*.

The EMPLAN identifies RFS and FRNSW as combat agencies, reflecting these legislative responsibilities, with the firefighting authorities, Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW) and National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), in support of those responsibilities.

Aim

The Plan aims to establish bush fire management arrangements in NSW, to reduce the impact of bush and grass fires on human life, communities, essential and community infrastructure, industry, agricultural assets, the economy, and the environment, before, during and after an emergency.

Objectives

Consistent with the *SERM Act 1989* and the EMPLAN, the objectives of the Plan are to:

- a) provide clarity as to command-and-control roles and coordination of functions in emergency management for bush fire incidents.
- b) emphasise risk management across the full spectrum of prevention, preparation, response and recovery.
- c) emphasise community engagement in the development and exercise of plans as well as in their operational employment.

d) ensure that the capability and resourcing requirements of these responsibilities are understood.

Scope

The Plan describes the arrangements for the control and coordination by the RFS Commissioner, for the response to Class 2 & Class 3 bush and grass fires, including those managed under the provisions of Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, and the provisions for Emergency Warnings (EW) at all classes of fires.

Class 1: A bush fire under the control of the responsible fire authority, whether or not incidental/low level assistance is provided by other agencies.

Class 2: A bush fire which by necessity involves more than one agency, and where a Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) have appointed a person to take charge of firefighting operations.

Class 3: A major bush fire where an appointment has been made, or is imminent, by the RFS Commissioner, under the

provisions of Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

These arrangements ensure that the RFS and FRNSW, can manage small-scale bush and grass fires, utilising assistance from the other firefighting authorities being NPWS and FCNSW.

Principles

The following principles apply to the Plan:

- The RFS is the lead combat agency for bush fires in NSW.
- It is implemented and referenced in conjunction with the EMPLAN, and other key Sub Plans and Supporting Plans, as appropriate.
- The protection of human life, both community and emergency services personnel, and the environment takes priority above all other obligations detailed in the Plan.
- Response and Recovery may operate concurrently, according to the type of emergency or support requirements.
- Management of bush fire operations will occur at, and across, the most effective levels of operations for the emergency type.
- This plan supports coordinated bush firefighting arrangements in NSW.

Maintenance of the Plan

The RFS will ensure this plan remains current by;

- Conducting exercises to test the Plan arrangements.
- Review the contents of this plan after;
 - a significant bush fire season; or
 - when there are changes that alter agreed Plan arrangements.
- As determined by the SEMC.

- At least every five years.

Integrated Strategies

The Plan outlines the integration of strategies to support NSW emergency management arrangements across Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR), and the All-Hazards framework. This is achieved by:

- Legislative provisions for the prevention and mitigation of bush fires.
- Integrated bush fire risk management planning throughout NSW.
- Management of several bush fire mitigation funding programs.
- Regular community engagement and public information campaigns.
- Development of partnerships and collaborative approaches.
- Shared responsibility across all stakeholders, guided by principles that consider the needs of land managers.
- Coordinated, risk-based approach to the management of bush fires.

Linking With Aboriginal Communities

Over the years, NSW fire agencies and have continued to work with Aboriginal communities, through initiatives such as the employment of Aboriginal mitigation crew members, Bush Fire Resilience for Aboriginal Communities Project (BRAC), and the Firesticks Workshop, where First Nations rangers undertake bush fire training, and training for operational staff in cultural awareness, due to increasing involvement in cultural burning activities.

There are 61 Discrete Aboriginal Communities (DAC) with whom fire agencies work closely with Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC), Traditional Owner Groups (TOG) and other Aboriginal Corporations to implement cultural burning across the State.

Cultural burning is currently undertaken by communities on private land, sometimes in partnership with fire authorities, and on public land in partnership with government agencies.

Cultural burning is about “Caring for Country” and maintaining healthy and ecologically diverse and productive landscapes. It is also about practicing cultural traditions.

Following the 2019/20 bush fire season, BFMCs are required to ensure meaningful Aboriginal representation and engagement, where Aboriginal communities are key partners in bush fire management, and part of the wider cultural land management practice, now and into the future.

NSW Government agencies, including Aboriginal Affairs NSW, continue to collaborate and champion programs such as the Cultural Fire Management (CFM) working group and associated strategies.

Fire Behaviour & Climate Drivers

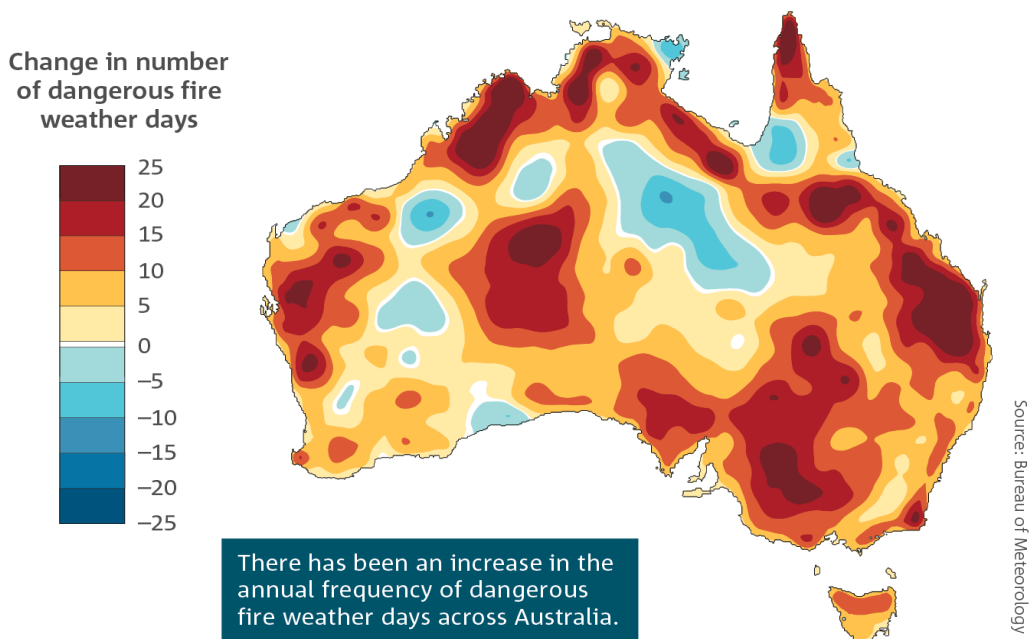
Climate change is influencing the frequency and severity of dangerous bush fire

conditions across Australia and other regions of the world, by influencing temperature, environmental moisture, weather patterns and fuel conditions. There have been significant changes observed in recent decades towards increased dangerous bush fire weather conditions, for various regions of Australia, including NSW.

Figure 1 shows there has been an increase in extreme fire weather, and the number of dangerous fire weather days across large parts of Australia since the 1950s. This has led to extensions to the Bush Fire Danger Period (BFDP) and larger and more frequent fires, especially in southern Australia.

These observed changes are also affecting inter-jurisdictional resource-sharing agreements, both domestic and internationally. An example of these impacts is the availability of specialist resources such as Large Air Tankers (LATs), as fire seasons are longer in both the northern and southern hemispheres.

Figure 1: Change in number of dangerous fire weather days 1950 -2020. State Bush Fire Co-Ordination Committee 2021.



Source- Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology- State of the Climate 2022, p. 5.



Section 1:

GOVERNANCE



Governance

Bush fire management arrangements in NSW are characterised by partnerships and shared responsibility between land owners/managers, the community, service providers, BFMCs, and emergency management committees at a local, regional, State and Commonwealth level.

Emergency services in NSW rely on a comprehensive suite of legislation and emergency management plans to support their day-to-day operations. This legislation and planning framework assign responsibilities to different agencies to plan for, prevent and combat emergencies. The guiding legislation for bush fire management in NSW is the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

Legislative Framework

The following legislation provides the framework for bush fire management in NSW:

- *Rural Fires Act (1997)*;
- *State Emergency & Rescue Management Act (1989)*;
- *Fire and Rescue Act (1989)*;
- *Rural Fires Regulation (2022)*.

Objectives of the Rural Fires Act

The *Rural Fires Act 1997* establishes the RFS as an independent statutory authority. The objects of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* are to provide:

(a) for the prevention, mitigation and suppression of bush and other fires in local government areas (or parts of areas), and other parts of the State constituted as rural fire districts, and;

(b) for the co-ordination of bush firefighting and bush fire prevention throughout the State, and;

(c) for the protection of persons from injury or death, and property from damage, arising from fires, and;

(c1) for the protection of infrastructure and environmental, economic, cultural, agricultural and community assets from damage arising from fires, and

(d) for the protection of the environment by requiring certain activities referred to in paragraphs (a)–(c1) to be carried out having regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development, described in section 6 (2) of the Protection of the Environment Administration Act (1991).

In addition, Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* empowers the RFS Commissioner to take charge of all bush firefighting operations, and bush fire prevention measures anywhere in NSW if, in the Commissioner's opinion, certain conditions are met. These conditions are outlined in the *Rural Fires Act* and in the preparedness section of this Plan.

Section 45 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, empowers the RFS Commissioner to give such directions the Commissioner considers necessary to Fire Control Officers, Deputy Fire Control Officers, officers of rural fire brigades, local authorities, officers or members of FRNSW, members of the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) and other persons in connection with the prevention, control or suppression of any bush fire in the area or locality in which the Commissioner has taken charge.

Rural Fires Regulation

On 13 May 2022, and following a period of public consultation, the *Rural Fires Regulation 2022* came into effect. The

Regulation remade, with minor amendments, the *Rural Fires Regulation 2013*.

The Regulation governs such matters as:

- › Membership of rural fire brigades, and the constitutions of brigades.
- › Constitution, membership and procedure of BFMCs.
- › Fire prevention, including BFDPs.
- › The issuing of various notices.

Management and Oversight

The RFS Commissioner, who is appointed by the Minister for Emergency Services, heads the RFS. The Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling the activities of the Service and has other functions conferred or imposed on them by, or under the *Rural Fires Act 1997*. The Commissioner invokes Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

RFS Organisational Structure

RFS Headquarters

The RFS Headquarters is located at Sydney Olympic Park. Headquarters contains the Commissioner's Office and a range of Directorates that provide the administrative functions to the Area Commands and Districts.

The State Operations Centre (OpsCen), State Air Desk (SAD), Bush Fire Information Line (BFIL), Operational Communications Centre (OCC) and the State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC) are also located within this facility.

RFS Area Commands and Districts

The RFS has fire management responsibilities for more than 95 per cent of the landmass of NSW. A total of 43 Districts are grouped into seven Area Commands.

The seven Area Commands allow a greater focus on localised decision-making and support, especially for our volunteer firefighters.

The seven Area Commands are:

- › Hunter
- › Western
- › Greater Sydney
- › North Western
- › South Western
- › North Eastern
- › South Eastern

Each of the 43 Districts contains one or more Fire Control Centres, where RFS staff members assist volunteers and brigades to prepare for and respond to operational incidents.

A Fire Control Centre forms the administrative and operational base of each rural fire district, coordinating and managing the local brigade responses to fires and other emergencies.

RFS Training Academy

The RFS Training Academy is located at Dubbo. The dedicated training facility is used to improve the skills and knowledge of RFS Staff and Volunteers. The facility is multi-agency and includes the aviation training centre of excellence.

This purpose-built training facility provides for multi-agency staging of resources within western NSW, and invites training collaboration and mobilisation with state, interstate and international agencies.

Fire and Rescue NSW

FRNSW is the NSW State Government agency responsible for the provision of fire

services in fire districts, and rescue and hazmat services across NSW. FRNSW is established under the *Fire and Rescue NSW Act 1989*, the *SERM Act 1989*, and other related legislation. FRNSW is one of the key agencies involved in the response phase of most emergency or disaster events throughout NSW.

The *Fire and Rescue NSW Act 1989* outlines the responsibilities of the FRNSW Commissioner and the agency in responding to and preventing fires.

FRNSW has its Headquarters and Logistics Support Centre at Greenacre; Operational Communication Centres at Alexandria and Newcastle and Emergency Services Academy at Orchard Hills.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

The NPWS is responsible for managing more than 8 million hectares of national parks and reserves (greater than 10% of NSW). NPWS plays a critical role in managing fire on national parks and reserves and responding to bush fires as one of four firefighting authorities established under the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

NPWS approach to fire management is focused on the protection of the community while conserving the environmental and cultural values in the face of an increasing risk posed by climate change. Managing fire regimes to improve the overall ecological health of the national park system in NSW is one of the key ways NPWS is delivering biodiversity conservation.

NPWS is an active partner in the collaborative multi-agency fire management arrangements in NSW and works closely with the other fire authorities to manage and suppress bush fire on and off NPWS managed lands. With access to an extensive fleet of vehicles, aircraft and heavy plant, NPWS has the capacity to make a significant

contribution to firefighting across NSW, inter-state and internationally.

Forestry Corporation of NSW

FCNSW is responsible for managing and mitigating fire across more than two million hectares of native and plantation forests as part of NSW's combined firefighting efforts.

FCNSW undertakes preparatory and preventative measures to protect communities, neighbouring properties and State forests from bush fires. Fire is also used to maintain the health of forest ecosystems and to create a rich seedbed for regeneration or replanting after timber harvesting.

FCNSW statutory obligations for fire management arise from the *Forestry Act 2012* and the *Rural Fires Act 1997*. These Acts place a responsibility on FCNSW to protect life and property from fire, minimize the spread of fire from State forests and other lands managed by FCNSW, and to protect State forests from the damaging effects of fires.

FCNSW has trained firefighters on staff who are available for deployments across the state. FCNSW staff are trained to national competencies to fulfil a variety of firefighting roles including field-based firefighters as well as office-based Incident Management Team (IMT) members.

FCNSW staff also fill several specialist fire roles such as plant operations managers, heavy plant supervisors, safety advisors and provide expertise in hazardous tree management.

Statutory and Key Committees

Statutory committees contribute to the strategic decision-making relevant to the RFS and its interaction between the community and other firefighting agencies.

These committees were formed to fulfil the requirements of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

Bush Fire Coordinating Committee

The *Rural Fires Act 1997* requires the RFS to maintain the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC). The BFCC is responsible for:

- the planning concerning bush fire prevention and coordinated bush firefighting.
- responsible for advising the RFS Commissioner on bush fire prevention, mitigation and coordinated bush fire suppression.
- the planning concerning bush fire prevention and coordinated bush firefighting.
- And other functions as are conferred or imposed by the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

The membership of the BFCC is set under Section 47 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

Bush Fire Management Committees

BFMCs are constituted by the BFCC for each rural fire district in NSW, and any fire district where a reasonable risk of bush fires exists.

Each BFMC is made up of a range of stakeholders to ensure the whole community is represented when considering bush fire management activities. They include landholders, land managers, fire authorities and community organisations.



Section 2:

PREVENTION

Prevention

Prevention is the elimination or reduction of exposure to a hazard in vulnerable communities. Bush fires cannot be eliminated, however mitigation activities can be undertaken to reduce the likelihood, vulnerability and consequence of bush fire.

Actively implementing prevention strategies plays a significant role in reducing the risk of bush fires and their potential associated impacts. Section 63 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* identifies the responsibilities of public authorities and landowners or occupiers to take steps to prevent bush fires, minimise the danger, or spread of bush fire on any land under its control including roads and highways.

Within NSW, all landowners or managers are obliged to take all practical steps to prevent the occurrence and spread of bush fire from or their land. This includes extinguishing fires or reporting fires to triple zero. The RFS Commissioner has the power to require landowners and/or managers to undertake bush fire hazard reduction and may carry out the work and recover the cost, if the landowner or manager fails to do so.

The BFCC may advise steps that are necessary to prevent the occurrence, spread or minimise danger on land, this may or may not be part of a Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (BFRMP).

Bush Fire Risk Management Planning

The BFCC implements an integrated bush fire risk management planning scheme that includes the preparation of BFRMP's by a local BFMC, throughout NSW.

BFRMP's identify bush fire risks to assets (life, property, and the environment), assign them a relative risk ranking, and identify treatment options required to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. BFRMP's identify the level of bush fire risk across respective areas, records treatment strategies, and associated responsible stakeholders.

Mitigation Strategies

Mitigation strategies are identified in BFRMP's and are implemented across the landscape to reduce the risk to communities:

➤ **Fuel management:** the reduction or modification of bush fire fuel with the intent of slowing the spread of bush fire and aiding firefighting operations.

- **Asset protection zones (APZ):** to protect human life, property and highly valued public assets.
- **Ignition management zones:** to reduce fire escalation in areas, where lightning ignitions are considered a high risk (such as ridgetops). To reduce fire propagation in areas subject to higher levels of human-caused ignitions, including arson. To reduce fire escalation via ridge-to-ridge ignition and other extreme fire behaviour.
- **Strategic fire advantage zones (SFAZ):** To provide strategic areas of fire protection advantage which will reduce the speed and intensity of bush fires, reduce the potential for spot fire development and aid in the containment of bush fires.
- **Land management zones:** to meet relevant land management objectives in areas where APZs or SFAZs are not appropriate.
- **Fire exclusion zones:** to exclude bush fires.
- **Community preparedness:** activities such as working with residents to improve

their level of planning and preparation for a fire, to increase the survivability of their home and families in the event of a fire.

- **Response:** specific response requirements for a particular area or value in addition to standard procedures. This may include specific actions in the BFMC Operation Coordination Plans or Fire Access and Fire Trail plan.

Bush Fire Mitigation Funding

The RFS manages a number of bush fire mitigation funding programs, using both federal and state funds. These programs are used to supplement the works otherwise undertaken by landowners or managers.

Bush Fire Hazard Complaints

Section 74a of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, provides a formal mechanism for the community to report bush fire hazard complaints. The RFS has developed an approach that is tenure blind, ensuring all lands, public and private, are dealt with consistently with a focus on ensuring identified hazards are dealt with. Through its duty of care, the RFS may identify a hazard that can also be managed through this process. This change is driven by the RFS commitment to increase community confidence and the timeliness of response to hazard complaints.

The RFS Commissioner has the power under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* to require the landowner or manager to remove the hazard, and to carry out the work if the land owner or manager fails to do so.

Safe Use of Fire

The safe use of fire is regulated by the RFS through the requirement for fire permits and implementation of days of Total Fire Ban (TOBAN). A BFDP is declared (usually from the beginning of October to the end of March in most areas), during which specific bush fire precautions apply.

A fire permit is issued by RFS for burning activities during the BFDP in rural fire districts, and at all times by FRNSW in fire districts across the State. Fire permits help ensure fire is used safely and minimise the danger to individuals, their property and the community.

Ignition Prevention

Ignition prevention includes community preparedness programs, fuel management and specific actions in the Ignition Prevention Plan (IPP).

Arson and ignition prevention strategies are developed by the Bush Fire Arson Task Force (state) and Inter-Agency Arson Working Groups (District).

Through collaboration with the NSWPF Arson Unit, the RFS collates, analyses, interprets and disseminates information related to suspicious incidents. This in turn feeds into wider community engagement activities and targeted prevention programs and operations.

There are heavy penalties for people caught throwing lit cigarettes from vehicles, especially on days of TOBAN.

Total Fire Ban

Bush fires are more likely to spread and cause damage on days when the weather is very hot, dry and windy. These are usually on days when the fire danger rating is Extreme or Catastrophic.

To reduce the risk of fires damaging or destroying life, property and the environment the RFS Commissioner, under delegation from the Minister, may declare a TOBAN for a specific fire weather area or for the entire state of NSW.

TOBANs are declared under Section 99 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, and prohibit the lighting, maintenance or use of any fire, or

class of fire in the open air for the period defined by the TOBAN.

Development in Bush Fire Prone Areas

Proposals for development in bush fire prone areas are assessed by the RFS for bush fire risk. Since 2001, Planning for Bush Fire Protection (PBP 2019) is a legislated requirement in the NSW planning system and has been considered industry best practice in the provision of bush fire protection standards for development on bush fire prone land. PBP 2019 is the current (2023) applicable guideline for development on bush fire prone land in NSW.

PBP 2019 builds on the outcomes and lessons of bush fire events experienced over the past decades, including the 2009 Black Saturday bush fires in Victoria. It provides the foundation for the application of bush fire protection during both the strategic planning and the development assessment phases of development.

The general principles underlying this document are that:

- a suite of bush fire protection measures are required to reduce the impact of a bush fire;
- protection measures are governed by the degree of threat posed to a development and the vulnerability of occupants;
- minimising the interface of a development to the hazard reduces the bush fire risk to the development;
- and good practice in planning, building and management reduces the risk to

developments and their occupants and increase their resilience

Community Engagement

The RFS and FRNSW conduct regular community engagement activities including an annual public information campaign prior to, and during the BFDP. The campaign provides advice on measures that individuals, business and communities can take to prepare for a bush fire and where they can seek additional information.

The RFS and FRNSW produce an extensive suite of guidelines and public information to support individuals, business and the communities, prepare for and address the threat of bush and grass fires. They are available through the RFS and FRNSW website.

Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents

The RFS administers the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) program. This is a free, one-off service which supports some of our most at-risk community members reduce their bush fire risk.

The AIDER program is designed for people who have limited domestic support available from family, relatives, friends or other services. This could include older people, people living with a disability, and people who are already receiving community assistance and services. Their property must also be on bush fire prone land.



NORTH ROCKS FIRE SERVICE

NOR



3. KNOW THE BUSH FIRE ALERT LEVELS

FIRE DANGER RATINGS

Your safety and survival may depend on the decision you make, even before there is a fire. Monitor the Fire Danger Ratings daily at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fdr

The higher the fire danger rating, the more dangerous a fire is likely to be.



RATINGS AND WHAT TO DO

MODERATE	HIGH	EXTREME
At MODERATE, be ready for all fires and be prepared to leave for fires in your area.	At HIGH, have a bush fire plan and be ready to leave for fires in your area.	At EXTREME, have a bush fire plan and be ready to leave for fires in your area. If you are not prepared, call the fire department on 133 369 for assistance.

Section 3:

PREPAREDNESS



NSW

www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

PREPARE. ACT.

Preparedness

There are a range of activities carried out by the emergency management sector, individuals and households, businesses, and community groups to fulfil their shared responsibility in preparing for bush fires. The NSW Government supports and facilitates these activities by providing resources, facilities and information as detailed below.

All members of the community, no matter where they live, must understand their bush fire risk. They have a responsibility to learn about bush fire and to undertake measures to mitigate their own exposure to it. They must act to ensure their own safety.

Bush fire safety involves effective planning and preparation prior to a bush fire, making informed decisions during the event, and having access to a range of safety options, in particular, places to shelter from the effects of the fire.

Responsibilities

The RFS is responsible for the response to and management of fires in rural fire districts, and FRNSW for fires within fire districts, under the provisions of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and the *Fire and Rescue Act 1989*. The EMPLAN identifies RFS and FRNSW as combat agencies, reflecting these legislative responsibilities. FCNSW and NPWS support these responsibilities as firefighting authorities.

In addition, Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* requires the RFS Commissioner to take charge of all bush firefighting operations and bush fire prevention measures anywhere in NSW if, in the Commissioner's opinion, certain conditions are met.

“44 (1) The Commissioner is to take charge of bush firefighting operations and bush fire prevention measures and to take such measures as the Commissioner considers necessary to control or suppress any bush fire in any part of the State if, in the opinion of the Commissioner:

(a) a bush fire has assumed or is likely to assume such proportions as to be incapable of control or suppression by the firefighting authority or authorities in whose area or locality it is burning, or

(b) the prevailing conditions are conducive to the outbreak of a bush fire likely to assume such proportions, or

(c) a bush fire is not being effectively controlled or suppressed by the firefighting authority or authorities in whose area or locality it is burning, or

(d) a bush fire is burning in a place that is not the responsibility of any firefighting authority”.

The combat agency with jurisdictional responsibility controls and oversees the response to fires and coordination of firefighting, with the exception of Class 2 and Class 3 fires (Section 44 declarations). This includes the activities of other firefighting authorities.

Other agencies may assist with response and associated operations, such as evacuation and public information, through the provision of staff and resources.

General responsibilities of emergency services and functional areas participating and supporting agencies are set out in the EMPLAN and may be supplemented through individual agreements.

State Capability

State Operations Centre

RFS maintains the State Operations Centre (OpsCen) and the State Air Desk (SAD) at the RFS Headquarters.

This facility serves as the primary state level operations and information centre for bush and grass fires. It operates 24 hours a day, with staffing levels determined by fire conditions.

FRNSW maintains a permanent presence in the OpsCen within a dedicated area known as the Bush Fire Incident Co-ordination Centre (BICC). FRNSW staffing in the BICC is increased when significant bush fire activity is forecast or occurring. Personnel from NPWS and FCNSW are also represented in the OpsCen during these times.

Daily Operational Readiness Levels are determined by the State Operations Controller (SOC) consistent with current Operational Management Procedures (OMP). The Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) informs the State, Area Commands and individual District readiness level to ensure the RFS is at the highest level of preparedness necessary to deal with any emergency.

There are four Operational Readiness Levels:

- › Operations Normal (Green)
- › Level 1 (Yellow)
- › Level 2 (Orange)
- › Level 3 (Red)

RFS prepares and maintains staffing rosters for key roles in the OpsCen to ensure that adequately trained and experienced personnel are available when required.

The OpsCen has work space allocated for a number of emergency service organisations and functional areas for use in the event of major bush fire conditions. These agencies include the Bureau of Meteorology, NPWS, FCNSW, NSWPF, NSW Ambulance (NSWA) and other utility and support organisations.

Fire Control Centres

BFMC are responsible for identifying to premises to enable IMTs to operate effectively, to control and coordinate bush fires throughout NSW. These are known as Fire Control Centres, of which there are more than 45 across the State. These facilities are maintained by RFS and FRNSW and are embedded in their local community to support local command and control arrangements.

These facilities, although designed for bush fire management, are suitable for incident management and can be used as EOC's with an all-hazards approach. As such, these facilities are a government resource and are available to other agencies where required.

Fire Fighting Resources

RFS, FRNSW, NPWS and FCNSW maintain firefighting capability to meet anticipated needs, including trained personnel for firefighting and specialist roles, logistics and supply arrangements, firefighting equipment and qualified incident management personnel.

Interoperable firefighting resources from multiple agencies, and from other jurisdictions, are facilitated through multi-agency training and exercising in conjunction with nationally aligned qualifications. The Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS), incident control system, also facilitates this interoperability for IMTs.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Mutual Aid Agreements (MAA) with other agencies in neighbouring jurisdictions (e.g.,

QLD, VIC, SA, ACT, and the Jervis Bay Territory) are in place to ensure smooth integration of firefighting operations in the vicinity of, and across, borders.

RFS, along with other combat agencies and firefighting authorities, are signatories to the National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC), and Arrangements for Interstate Assistance (AIA). RFS leads interstate and international deployments for natural hazards on behalf of NSW agencies as part of the Resource Managers Group (RMG).

Specialist Resources

The Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology maintains a dedicated meteorologist presence within the RFS. This meteorologist works with the RFS Predictive Services Team to provide specialist advice, fire weather forecasting, fire weather briefings and other meteorology services as required for bush fires and hazard reductions. This meteorologist is embedded within the OpsCen during heightened operational periods.

The RFS engages other specialist resources, on a contractual basis. These include resources from aviation operators, heavy plant and equipment operators, and transport, accommodation and logistics organisations. Some of these are on contract for the duration of the fire season, and some are obtained on a “Call-When-Needed” basis.

Aviation Preparedness

Aviation support contributes to the effective management and suppression of bush fires. Aircraft have specific fire suppression tactical advantages providing rapid detection and response as well as access to bush fires in remote and inaccessible areas. All aircraft resources are managed by the SAD located within the OpsCen.

The RFS sources aircraft in a variety of ways. As well as owning a range of aircraft, the RFS coordinates the management of aerial firefighting procurement including Call When Needed (CWN) Standing Offer arrangements, in accordance with the NSW Government Procurement Policy Framework, and exclusive use contracts through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC). Aerial firefighting contracts include aircraft, fuel trucks and specialist equipment. Contract resources can be accessed by all fire authorities on a user pays basis.

All agencies contribute to the strategic direction and capability of aerial fire management activities through the Aviation Advisory Committee (AAC) and the tactical direction and capability of aerial fire management activities through the Inter-Agency Aviation Working Group (IAAWG). The IAAWG is a sub-committee that reports to the AAC.

Personnel performing management, operational or support tasks for aviation operations will be appropriately trained and certified according to training and assessment strategies for aviation specialist qualifications and to national competency standards where these exist.

Incident Management Tools

The RFS maintains and manages an online computer-based incident management application system, known as Incident Control Online (ICON). This system provides the primary means of exchanging operational information between the OpsCen, District and Area Command offices, IMTs and other agencies. This system is the single source of information relating to bush and grass fires in NSW, which informs situational awareness and public information platforms such as Hazards Near Me NSW Application (App).

ICON is integrated with several other RFS corporate systems including Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) and the Common Operating Picture (COP). ICON is also linked to the FRNSW CAD system resulting in new incidents being auto populated into ICON.

It is available wherever an internet connection is available and is accessible to authorised personnel who require access, irrespective of their agency. As this system links to the RFS public website, it is critical that all incident information for bush and grass fires is entered into the ICON system.

The RFS uses a CAD system to allocate the closest and most appropriate RFS resource to an incident, depending on the level of operational readiness. This system can be operated by a combination of the OCC and volunteer communications brigades.

ATHENA is an evidence based, intelligence driven, RFS customised system, built using the Fire Story platform as its foundation. The system ingests information from several information sources and provides situational awareness to RFS decision makers through reliable, timely, and scalable intelligence improving community and environmental protections during fire events and incidents.

ATHENA can predict fire patterns and the impact of fire on various values and assets, by using fire simulation characteristics such as fire spread, flame height, intensity, size, and ember density. Suppression efforts can also be predicted and considered. The results can be shared with other users and stored within the database.

ARENA is a web-based national aviation management system developed and maintained through the NAFC. The system stores all details of aircraft, fuel trucks and related aviation specialist equipment. The RFS uses ARENA to store all information and provide approvals for all aircraft, fuel trucks and specialist equipment that are the

subject of a contractual agreement through NAFC or Call-When- Needed arrangements.

The NSW Government operates an integrated radio communications network comprising strategic, tactical and task-appropriate platforms, using Public Safety Network (PSN), Private Mobile Radio (PMR) and Very High Frequency (VHF) systems. It enables communication between a range of NSW emergency services and support agencies.

Local communications arrangements between the fire services and government land managers with firefighting capacity are described within local plans of operations prepared under the provisions of Section 52 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* by BFMCS.

Planning

Community Protection Planning

A Community Protection Plan (CPP) is a detailed tactical bush fire planning document prepared in consultation with the community and stakeholders at a local level.

CPP's provide the public, fire services and land management agencies with easy-to-understand information that is specific to a community. A CPP consists of three maps with supporting documentation. It presents an overview of the bush fire threat for the area, the protection options available to the community, as well as the current and proposed risk treatment works. The CPP also captures any locally important information, including the location of Special Fire Protection Purpose (SFPP) assets, which can be used by local brigades and emergency services, during pre-incident planning exercises and firefighting operations.

Current CPPs are available on the RFS website.

Fire Access and Fire Trail Plans

Firefighters rely on public roads, trails and other tracks on public and private land to access the landscape, to prevent and contain bush fires. Fire trails exist for the purpose of providing access to respond to bush fires, and it is critical to identify and maintain an effective network of accessible trails. The NSW Government is establishing a more integrated and strategic network of fire trails and access arrangements to improve accessibility for firefighters during bush fires and hazard reduction burns.

Section 62 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* provides for the RFS Commissioner to make Fire Trail Standards that (without limitation) may set out: Classification, length, width, gradient, signage, construction standards and maintenance of fire trails. The structure and form of Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) plans and treatment registers are prepared by local BFMCs.

In order to provide a consistent approach to fire trail planning across NSW, the *Rural Fires Act 1997* requires BFMCs to prepare a draft FAFT plan for their area. This must be prepared in accordance with requirements set out in BFCC Policy.

The FAFT plan will supplement existing fire planning activities undertaken at the local level, such as bush fire risk management planning, and identify the appropriate means of accessing land to prevent, fight, manage or contain bush fires.

Plan of Operations

Section 52 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* requires BFMCs to prepare a Plan of Operations for their rural fire district. These plans establish the coordinated procedures to be followed in the event of a bush fire, or if the prevailing conditions are conducive to the outbreak of a bush fire.

Evacuation Planning

The Evacuation Management Guideline endorsed by the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC), and Community Safety & Coordinated Evacuations Policy endorsed by the BFCC inform evacuation arrangements during bush fires.

Evacuation arrangements are developed and recorded within local EMPLANS and Consequence Management Guides (CMG), prepared by Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs). The plans cover an assessment of the circumstances potentially triggering evacuations, the operational arrangements for managing these, evacuation routes and evacuation centres.

Neighbourhood Safer Places

Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs) are places of last resort for people whose personal bush fire survival plans are either overwhelmed or affected by circumstances which prevent implementation.

NSPs are designated and signposted, and a register of these is maintained by the RFS. This list, in addition to further information about NSPs, is accessible through the RFS website.

As NSPs are a place of last resort, they are not linked with any evacuation routes, and emergency management or functional area support may not be available.

The RFS undertakes annual inspections of designated NSPs to ensure their ongoing suitability and may require bush fire hazard reduction work to be carried out to maintain their level of protection.

Public Information and Media

The RFS provides fire safety awareness training and accreditation to media personnel to enable them to operate safely in the vicinity of bush fires.

The RFS, in co-operation with other agencies, coordinate bush fire safety information, engagement activities and public awareness campaigns relating to bush and grass fires.

The RFS will coordinate daily media arrangements, such as regular media conferences, media releases and the release of statistics when available.

During periods of significant fire activity, the RFS may establish a regular schedule of media conferences and updates to provide information and warnings directly to the community via the media.

The RFS may request the attendance of participating and supporting agencies at the OpsCen to ensure media and public information is coordinated.

The RFS provides a single source of bush and grass fire information across the State through the RFS public website and social media platforms, regardless of which agency is combating the fire. Incidents entered into the ICON system will be displayed on the RFS website and Hazards Near Me NSW App.

Facilities for the media are provided within the OpsCen to ensure the timely provision of public information and safety messages to the community during bush and grass fires.

Operational Readiness Briefings

The RFS conducts annual State and area exercises to test multi-agency operational and coordination arrangements.

Prior to the commencement of the bush fire danger period, the RFS coordinates multi-agency pre-season briefings at area and state levels.

Multi agency after action reviews and debriefings following incidents are also conducted to assess the adequacy of

coordination arrangements and operational readiness. These reviews can be conducted at local, area command or State level.

After action reviews are an opportunity to identify possible improvements to coordination arrangements, as well as opportunities to improve interoperability and outcomes during multi-agency responses.

Outcomes are collated by the RFS to facilitate continuous improvement.

Fire Danger Information

NSW Bush Fire Season Outlook

The RFS prepares an annual NSW Bush Fire Season Outlook for the NSW Emergency Services Minister, to present to Parliament.

The statement provides a summary of available information relating to the bush fire risk across the state, including weather and climatic conditions, agency information relating to firefighting capability and resources, risk management and mitigation works, and research relating to community preparedness. The report provides a summary of this information that will change as the bush fire season advances and is shared with all agencies.

Australian Warning System

All bush fires in NSW are assigned a warning level consistent with the Australian Warning System (AWS). This system is a national approach to information and warnings during emergencies and natural disasters such as bush fire, flood, storm, extreme heat and severe weather. The AWS uses a nationally consistent set of icons, to show incidents on websites and relevant Apps.

Figure 2 outlines the different levels of the AWS as applied to a bush fire incident in NSW and displayed on the Hazards Near Me NSW App and RFS Website.

Figure 2- Emergency Warnings and descriptors



ADVICE

A fire has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.



WATCH AND ACT

There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.



EMERGENCY WARNING

An Emergency Warning is the highest level of Bush Fire Alert. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.

Fire Weather Warnings

The Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology issues fire weather warnings when forecast weather conditions are likely to be dangerous. Warnings are normally issued in the afternoon for the following day so as to be available for evening television and radio news broadcasts. Warnings are renewed at regular intervals and may be issued or amended and reissued at any time if a need is identified.

On a day when dangerous bush fire activity is more likely, the community should stay in touch with information from the RFS and emergency services via their website and social media, tune into emergency broadcasters, or keep up-to-date with the fire weather warnings by checking the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology website.

Fire weather warnings are issued for the areas delineated by Fire Weather Forecast Areas boundaries.

Fire Danger Ratings

Fire Danger Ratings (FDRs) are produced by the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology in consultation with the RFS. These are distributed within the fire services, other emergency services, functional areas and to supporting agencies, and communicated to the community through a variety of mediums, including the media, RFS website, Bush Fire Information Line, social media and roadside signs.

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) was developed using the latest science to be more accurate and relevant to local communities. The system, released in 2022, is used across Australia, so members

of the community, whether at home or traveling, will see the same ratings being used.

FDRs describe the potential level of danger should a bush fire start. They are important because they provide people with information so that they can take action to protect themselves and others from the potentially dangerous impacts of bush fires.

There are four levels of fire danger as shown in Figure 3. FDRs are issued on days when there is a fire risk.

Each fire danger has a clear set of messages including the actions the community can take to reduce their risk.

Fire Behaviour Index

The FBI provides a scale of potential fire behaviour based on:

- Fire intensity
- Flame height
- Rate of spread
- Spotting potential

It can be used to support decisions such as:

- When it is safe to conduct prescribed burn activities
- Which bush fire suppression strategies are safe or effective
- When it is not safe to use equipment that may spark a fire
- When TOBANS may be required
- Dictates the operational readiness level consistent with Operational Management Procedures

Figure 3- Australian Fire Danger Rating System

Australian Fire Danger Rating System



Fire Danger	MODERATE	HIGH	EXTREME	CATASTROPHIC
Key Message	Plan and prepare.	Be ready to act.	Take action now to protect your life and property.	For your survival, leave bush fire risk areas.
Fire Behaviour	Most fires can be controlled.	Fires can be dangerous.	Fires will spread quickly and be extremely dangerous.	If a fire starts and takes hold, lives are likely to be lost.
Supporting Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay up to date and be ready to act if there is a fire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There's a heightened risk. Be alert for fires in your area. Decide what you will do if a fire starts. If a fire starts, your life and property may be at risk. The safest option is to avoid bush fire risk areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are dangerous fire conditions. Check your bush fire plan and that your property is fire ready. If a fire starts, take immediate action. If you and your property are not prepared to the highest level, go to a safer location well before the fire impacts. Reconsider travel through bush fire risk areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire. Your life may depend on the decisions you make, even before there is a fire. For your survival, do not be in bush fire risk areas. Stay safe by going to a safer location early in the morning or the night before. If a fire starts and takes hold, lives and properties are likely to be lost. Homes cannot withstand fires in these conditions. You may not be able to leave and help may not be available.



Section 4:

RESPONSE

Response

Response involves undertaking appropriate measures to respond to an event, including actions taken and measures planned before, during and immediately after a bush fire, to ensure that its effects are minimised, and people affected by the event, are given immediate relief and support.

Concept of Operations

Responsibility and management of fires in rural fire districts rests with the RFS, and in fire districts, FRNSW. Consistent with the 'All Hazard, All Agency' approach to emergency management in NSW, other agencies can assist the identified combat agency where required.

In addition, the RFS Commissioner will take charge of bush firefighting operations anywhere in NSW if, in their opinion certain conditions set out in Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* are met, or on advice from the OpsCen, an Incident Controller (IC) or a local BFMC and based on observations and predictions.

Involvement of personnel from agencies other than the fire service in charge of a fire,

is at the discretion of that fire service notwithstanding, legislative authority and requirements.

Classification of Fires

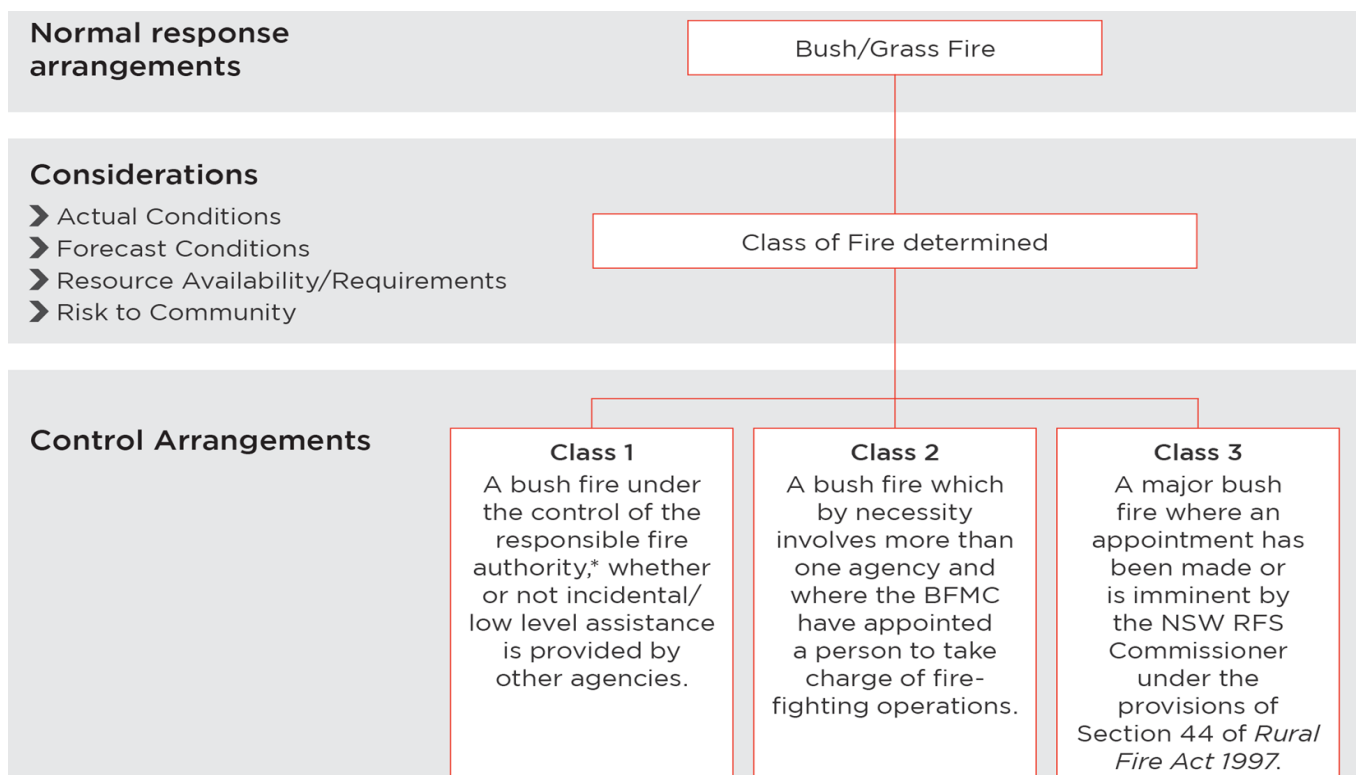
All bush, grass and scrub Fires are classified in accordance with BFCC Policy.

There are three classifications:

- > Class 1
- > Class 2
- > Class 3

The determination as to whether a fire should be managed at Class 2 will be made by the relevant fire service in consultation with the relevant BFMC Fire Classification Group. Class 3 fires are determined by the RFS Commissioner, taking into account local recommendations.

Figure 4 - Incident Class and Control Arrangements.



Appointment of Incident Controllers

Fire coordination at all classes of bush fire will be under the control of an IC determined in accordance with:

- For class 1: A bush fire under the control of the responsible fire authority, whether or not incidental/low level assistance is provided by other agencies.
- For class 2: A bush fire which by necessity involves more than one agency and where a BFMC have appointed a person to take charge of firefighting operations.
- For class 3: A major bush fire where an appointment has been made or is imminent, by the RFS Commissioner under the provisions of Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

The actions of the IC are monitored by the next layer in the chain of command, who may intervene if it is considered those actions are inadequate for the situation. Except during periods of a Section 44 declaration, the fire service with jurisdictional authority maintains responsibility for the management of the incident.

During periods of a Section 44 declaration, the IC is subject to the direction of the RFS Commissioner. All personnel operating on a fire ground are subject to the direction of the IC irrespective of their source agency. Outside a declaration of a Section 44 the IC operates through the established fire service chain of command.

The IC is responsible for forming an IMT, as required, and may seek assistance from the SOC or Major Incident Co-ordination (MIC) to source additional personnel and resources if sufficient personnel are not locally available.

Personnel in IMTs and on fire grounds must be trained, experienced and capable of fulfilling the role to the satisfaction of the fire service in charge of the fire. Operations are

to be conducted in accordance with procedures determined by the fire service in charge of the fire, having regard to any prepared BFMC BFRMP or Plan of Operations.

Activities undertaken by agencies are to be funded in line with existing agency management funding arrangements.

Where practicable, the normal procedures within respective agencies are to be used for the acquisition and supply of goods and services.

If a requirement for goods and services is beyond the resources of individual agencies, the matter is to be referred to the IC or SOC in the first instance, who may engage the SEOC to assist in accordance with arrangements outlined in the EMPLAN.

Incident Response

Fire Fighting Resources

Appropriate resources are responded to reports of a fire in accordance with jurisdictional responsibilities, and in accordance with the MOU, SOPs and local MAA between RFS and FRNSW. These resources can be supported by additional resources from NPWS and FCNSW.

Aviation Resources and State Air Desk

The RFS and NSW State Emergency Service (SES) are jointly responsible for managing the SAD and co-ordinating whole of government aviation support during bush fire and flood emergencies (excluding Ambulance and Police) in accordance with current agreements.

Aircraft are used for a variety of fire management roles in NSW, including:

- Fire detection;
- Crew transport;

- Crew insertion and extraction;
- Rescue of at-risk personnel during incidents;
- Visual and electronic reconnaissance;
- Command, control and communications;
- Fire suppression;
- Aerial ignition, both prescribed burning and back burning operations.

The SAD arranges logistical support for fire-fighting and supporting aircraft, including fuel, retardant/suppressant, ground crew and specialist airborne personnel.

Local infrastructure and support for aerial reconnaissance and fire suppression operations are identified in the Section 52 Plan of Operations, prepared by each BFMC.

The principles of dispatch procedures used by the SAD will ensure that for any immediate (urgent) request for resources, the fastest response to the incident scene matching the request, will be dispatched. Where a request is made for a planned aviation resources tasking (non-urgent), the most cost-effective resource will be dispatched.

When there are significant levels of fire activity, usually associated with one or more Section 44 declarations, periods of significant lightning activity or the declaration of a TOBAN, the SAD State Air Operations Manager or delegate will consult with relevant agencies to implement 'co-ordinated fire-fighting arrangements'.

These arrangements will ensure that all requests for aviation resources are prioritised and allocated in a manner that provides the best support and value for money to the NSW community.

From the commencement of co-ordinated fire-fighting arrangements, fire agencies will

ensure the dispatch and allocation of all aircraft, fuel trucks and specialist equipment during bush fire response operations, will occur in coordination with the rostered SAD State Air Operations Manager.

This will ensure maximum efficiency and priority to those incidents with a greater risk of actual or potential threat to life and/or property.

The SAD will liaise with other agencies (such as Police and Ambulance) and work with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority regarding airspace management and restrictions over active fire grounds.

Agency Aviation Capability

The RFS owns and operates several aircraft to assist with suppression efforts, intelligence gathering, and to provide search and rescue capability to the community.

This capability includes a permanent LAT with support aircraft, and an aircraft with scanning capability able to produce high-resolution imagery.

In addition to the fixed wing aircraft are several medium helicopters. These are equipped for search and rescue and aerial intelligence, using infrared and/or visual light detection sensors that can be live streamed to inform immediate decision making, as well as providing mapping and close-range imaging.

FRNSW maintain a comprehensive whole of Government Remote Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) that provide timely and accurate intelligence during planning, preparedness, response and recovery phases of bush fires.

NPWS and FCNSW also maintain an RPAS capability which can provide similar assistance during the various operational phases.

These resources are placed strategically across the State and can be moved as fire conditions dictate.

Pre-Determined Dispatch of Aircraft

Pre-Determined Dispatch (PDD) is an initiative to introduce early suppression to new fires and to reduce the response time of aviation assets arriving at a fire incident. The aim is to keep the fire small by providing aerial firefighting assets at the earliest opportunity, ensuring ground crews are supported and IMTs receive the timely provision of essential intelligence.

PDD aircraft are suitable for the specific area they will cover and could be either fixed wing aircraft or a helicopter with a belly tank capable of assisting with suppression efforts. PDD aircraft are stood up at strategic locations across the state on days where the FBI is 35 or above.

Rapid Aerial Response Teams

RFS and NPWS jointly deliver the NSW Rapid Aerial Response Teams (RART) initiative using a tenure-blind approach. RART involves positioning dedicated helicopters and remote area firefighters in the highest risk areas of NSW to respond to bush fires as quickly as possible. RART teams help to prevent bush fires from becoming large and threatening life, property, environmental or cultural assets.

State Operations Centre

RFS will contact supporting agencies and organisations to request their presence in the State Operations Centre (OpsCen) when required, or as identified through the Operational Readiness and Alert Level.

The OpsCen will disseminate advice and information to ICs. MICs and IMTs such as forecast weather, aerial line scan images, fire spread predictions and situational information.

Specialised services that may be facilitated through the OpsCen during major operations include:

- › Analysing and predicting bush fire behaviour;
- › Providing, co-ordinating and supporting aviation, heavy plant (ARENA HP) and specialised firefighting team operations.
- › Organising travel, accommodation and support for operational personnel;
- › Providing or arranging logistical support for major incident operations;
- › Liaising with relevant external agencies, utilities and authorities;
- › Liaising with international and interstate/territory firefighting and supporting agencies;
- › Liaising with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and federal agencies;
- › Facilitating purchases and contracts to support operational activities;
- › Administering finances associated with operational activities;
- › Coordinating bush fire (cause and origin) investigation activities;
- › Coordinating fire investigation;
- › Initiating the investigation of significant accidents during operations;
- › Identification and tasking of aircraft to support firefighting operations

State Operations Controller

The State Operations Controller (SOC) oversees activity within the OpsCen and performs several functions on behalf of the RFS Commissioner. State Operations personnel provide advice and assistance to the RFS Commissioner and provide advice, assistance, direction and arrange the supply of resources to IMTs as required.

The SOC specifies the operational readiness level (detailed in preparedness) for the OpsCen based on a combination of FDRs and the level of fire activity. These arrangements provide for small-scale incidents to be managed at a local level, with increased involvement at area and state levels, as conditions dictate.

The SOC also provides the combat agencies and functional areas with an overview of the current state-wide situation, a general focus for local activities, key actions being implemented at the state level, key resources likely to be available and command, control, and communications arrangements at the state level.

The functions of the SOC include:

- Facilitate incident information and briefings for the RFS Commissioner, other firefighting authorities, SEMC members, media and other agencies;
- Operational and pre-emptive support including incident IMT personnel, aviation support and firefighting resources;
- Coordinate RFS assistance to other combat agencies under the *SERM Act 1989*, and to other states, territories or countries, upon request;
- Ensure the dissemination of weather intelligence, specifically fire weather forecasts and TOBANs under Section 99 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*;
- Provide advice regarding declarations under Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*;
- Provide overall direction and support for fire control activities;
- Escalate the level of control of a bush fire, or the overall control of bush fires across an area, where required; and
- Maintain state-wide situational awareness.

The RFS OpsCen has plans to ensure business continuity in the event of an emergency occurring in the centre.

These plans include the provision of a secondary site in western Sydney with facilities to accommodate State Operations including external agency representatives. This site also includes facilities for the 24/7 OCC.

Assistance and Additional Resources

Additional firefighting and supporting resources may be sourced locally or from adjoining areas. When local resources are insufficient or unavailable, requests for additional support will be coordinated by the responsible fire authority of Class 1 fires.

If resource requests cannot be met using this arrangement, or where the bush fire or grass fire is being managed in accordance with Class 2 or Class 3 arrangements, requests will be directed to the OpsCen for action in consultation with all firefighting authorities.

Resources from external supporting agencies may be requested directly at any level (local, area or state), as per existing emergency management arrangements such as MOUs and MAAs.

Requests for interstate assistance are made by the relevant fire Commissioner or nominee directly to interstate fire services, under existing MOU and national resource-sharing arrangements.

Outside of local arrangements, the RFS Commissioner may request the provision of assistance from the ADF through the SEOC, if required.

Specialist Resources

The decision to deploy or withdraw state resources, such as aircraft, is made by the SOC, in consultation with the IC and MIC. This includes requests from other firefighting authorities.

Dispatch of aircraft for reconnaissance, line scanning, and/or firefighting is normally on the request of an IC to the SAD, however can be requested by the SOC and MIC where multiple fires are identified.

Aviation and other resources may be mobilised by the SOC on their initiative, if the need for an urgent response is evident. The IC will be advised of such mobilisation as soon as practicable.

Personnel trained in fire investigation and damage assessment are maintained by RFS and FRNSW. Fire investigation and damage assessment personnel are deployed by the SOC as required during major bush fires. In particular, the SOC will coordinate fire investigations for all fires declared under Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

The NSWPF is responsible for the co-ordination of search and rescue, disaster victim registration and disaster victim identification activities.

Base Camps

The RFS and FRNSW have the capability to deploy base camps to support operation and recovery activities at short notice. Base camps can facilitate emergency operations and accommodation requirements for all hazard emergencies.

Base camps can be deployed anywhere in NSW with a suitable location within 72 hours of a request, and can be tailored to meet the needs of emergency services or functional areas, without placing a strain on local accommodation or services in the affected area.

Restriction of Access to Firegrounds

The IC is responsible for determining whether to restrict access to an area, unless a crime scene is declared at which point the NSWPF assume responsibility.

Media access to the fire ground is at the discretion of the IC. However, the default position is to allow access to accredited media wearing appropriate personal protective equipment and identification, unless a significant risk or extenuating circumstances exist.

Access for supporting agencies and organisations will be assessed by the IC based on safety considerations. Unaccompanied personnel entering a fire ground will need to have completed a level of bush fire awareness training, consistent with existing MOUs and agency agreements.

NSWPF will assist the RFS and FRNSW in restricting access to areas at-risk during a bush fire event.

The NSWPF will be responsible for law enforcement in damaged and evacuated communities.

Evacuation

Evacuation is a risk mitigation strategy that may be used to mitigate the effects of an emergency on a community. The decision to evacuate is complex and requires careful consideration to ensure residents are not placed at greater risk.

Decisions to undertake planned evacuations/relocations will be made by the IC and where possible, in consultation with the NSWPF and/or relevant Emergency Operations Controller (EOCON). The actual activity is co-ordinated by the NSWPF and/or EOCON.

Irrespective of this arrangement, the NSWPF always has the discretion to undertake emergency evacuations at any time if considered necessary (pursuant to Section 60L of the *SERM Act 1989*). The NSWPF will liaise with or inform the IC prior to or at the earliest opportunity of any evacuations/relocations carried out to ensure a coordinated approach and the safety of residents.

Evacuation centres and evacuation trigger points, should be included in BFMC bush fire Plans of Operations and Local EMPLANs.

The EOCON may be requested to carry out and/or coordinate supporting arrangements arising from any evacuation. The IC will notify the EOCON if such support (e.g. evacuation centres, animal care) are likely to be required.

State of Emergency

The RFS Commissioner provides advice to the relevant Minister considering current and predicted bush fire activity. The Minister then advises the Premier as to the need for a declaration of a 'State of Emergency', under the provisions of the *SERM Act 1989*.

The *SERM Act 1989* provides for the declaration of a 'State of Emergency', which may be declared by the Premier for up to 30 days, over parts of or the whole state, when significant and widespread danger to life and/or property exists.

Such declarations are made on the advice of the Minister and SEOCON, however consultation is to occur with the combat agency IC and other relevant stakeholders.

Following the declaration of a 'State of Emergency', the Minister is responsible for controlling and coordinating the activities of relevant government agencies, and the allocation of such available resources of the government, as the Minister considers necessary for responding to the emergency.

For that purpose, the Minister may direct any government agency to do or refrain from doing any act. The declaration of a 'State of Emergency' affords additional and exceptional powers to emergency services officers and special protections as outlined in the EMPLAN.

State Emergency Operations Controller

The State Emergency Operations Controller (SEOCON) is a member of the New South Wales Police Force Senior Executive Services and is responsible for supporting a combat agency that is primarily responsible for controlling a response to an emergency.

Senior Police Officers are also appointed as EOCONs at a local and regional level to provide support to an Incident Controller during a bush fire emergency.

State Emergency Operations Centre

The OpsCen disseminates information to the State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC) for the SEMC and the relevant Minister, on behalf of the RFS Commissioner.

At times of significant bush fire activity, the SEOC will monitor bush fire operations and keep members of the SEMC informed, by distributing RFS situation reports and other operational information. It will assist the SEOCON to coordinate support to the fire services.

Emergency Service Organisations & Functional Areas

Emergency Service Organisations work closely on a day-to-day basis and have existing standing agreements in place to support emergency operations, including bush fires.

Functional Areas represent key sectors and provide support to the RFS and other fire agencies. They conduct planning and preparation on their own initiative in addition to providing support during response operations.

Consequence Management Guides drafted by Regional and Local Emergency Management Committees articulate roles, responsibilities and actions required from

response and partner agencies at a local/regional level.

EMPLAN and Appendix 1 of this plan provides further information regarding Functional Areas.

Public Information and Warnings

The RFS is the lead agency for the issuing of public information and warnings relating to bush fires and bush fire threats.

Section 9 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, provides that the RFS is responsible for issuing public warnings and alerts about bush fires and bush fire threats in NSW, for the purpose of protecting life and property, irrespective of jurisdictional area.

Information about bush fires is provided through a range of channels, including the RFS website and the Hazards Near Me NSW App. The information is broadcast on these channels is generated through the ICON system.

Alert Levels

All bush and grass fires will have an alert level assigned that is consistent with the AWS (Advice, Watch & Act, and Emergency Warning). These levels are described in the preparation section of this plan.

The RFS has responsibility for the provision of information and associated public messaging and warnings through channels including Hazards Near Me NSW App, the RFS website, RFS social media channels and Emergency Alert, regardless of jurisdiction, for all bush and grass fires.

All media and public information for fires with an 'Advice' or 'Watch & Act' alert level is coordinated by the combat agency; however information will be made available at a state level through ICON.

This will allow information to be shared through agreed channels and the RFS Public Information Unit (PIU).

The determination of incident alert level and associated public information is made by the IC. The SOC and PIU monitors incidents to ensure the need for public warnings are being identified and that associated warnings are issued in a timely manner.

Warnings and messages will be made in accordance with RFS policy and procedures and the Public Information and Warnings Protocol.

Information and community advice relating to fires at an Emergency Warning level is to be provided to SOC.

Notification to the SOC should also be provided when fires have the potential to:

- Impact on either life or property;
- Generate a large number of public enquiries; or
- Impact of major arterial roads/highways or other infrastructure.

The RFS will coordinate public warnings through media, including through emergency broadcasting arrangements and media conferences.

The Public Information Functional Area Co-ordinator (PIFAC) and member agencies may be called upon to assist during times of prolonged or significant fire activity to coordinate whole of government messaging.

During such periods a PIFAC representative will be present within the OpsCen in order to liaise directly with the RFS PIU.

To further assist with the provision of information to the community the RFS operates a 24-hour BFIL which is maintained at the OpsCen.



Section 5:

RECOVERY



Recovery

Recovery is the coordinated process of supporting disaster-affected communities' economic, social, built and natural environments. Recovery includes taking care of physical well-being, reconstruction of physical infrastructure, economic and environmental restoration, regeneration of the natural environment, and the management of pollution and contamination.

Recovery presents an opportunity to further reduce risks and develop community resilience. During recovery, the community may learn more about the risks that it faces and may apply this knowledge to build resilience. Property and infrastructure that is damaged or destroyed may be constructed to a more resilient standard. Other vulnerabilities in a community, such as mental health, may be identified and addressed during recovery, with the long-term aim of increasing resilience.

Recovery Arrangements

Recovery arrangements are detailed in the State Recovery Plan. This plan is consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery including;

- Understand the context
- Recognise the complexity
- Use community-led approaches
- Coordinate all activities
- Communicate effectively
- Recognise and build capacity

The responsibility for the overall coordination of recovery operations in NSW rests with the State Emergency Recovery Controller (SERCON).

Recovery Committees may be established at the state, regional or local level depending on the scale and severity of a bush fire.

Recovery operations will often begin while the response phase is still underway. The fire service in charge will regulate access to the fire ground and provide information and assistance to recovery organisations, with a view to the earliest possible commencement of recovery operations.

In the event of a significant bush or grassfire, the EOCON will work closely with the IC to

complete an impact/damage assessment that will be utilised by the SERCON to determine the level of recovery required.

The RFS will work closely with the NSWPF when undertaking damage assessments to ensure a coordinated approach.

The RFS will make available appropriate information and advice to the SERCON and local government to assist in Natural Disaster Declaration determinations.

Rapid Damage Assessment

The importance of fast and accurate information in the post impact phase of a bush fire is critical in the transition to recovery for a community. This information need is met through a coordinated multi-agency approach by conducting Rapid Damage Assessments (RDA) following a bush fire.

In NSW, when a dwelling has been reported as damaged or destroyed from a bush fire, specialist teams are deployed to the fire ground to undertake a RDA. These teams conduct a rapid assessment of the fire ground to determine the number and location of damaged and destroyed houses.

This assessment also identifies any hazardous materials such as asbestos and chemicals in the impact zone. This

information is collected in digital systems and can be used to report on damage and plan for recovery requirements, including the involvement of other functional areas to assist with recovery operations.

Following a RDA, a more detailed Building Impact Assessment (BIA) may occur. The BIA considers additional information related to the building location, construction materials and other relevant factors related to the building damage. This information can then be used to inform further research and building design to improve community resilience through recovery.

The all-agency approach is used when forming RDA teams, this approach ensures maximum availability of members while not impacting response activities where they are still occurring.

Impacts on Indigenous and Cultural Sites

Bush fires can damage or destroy important Aboriginal cultural sites and artefacts. Following the 2019/20 Black Summer fires, NPWS worked with its Aboriginal joint management partners across the State to survey and assess the impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The surveys record damage and impacts and assist in finding previously unrecorded sites that had become exposed due to the reduced surrounding vegetation.

Make Safe Works

The RFS will assist to manage areas that have been damaged through suppression or control activities during bush fire activity in order to mitigate any immediate risks (and make safe).

This work is managed in conjunction with the IC and transitioned to the appropriate recovery agencies such as the NSW Reconstruction Authority or as agreed with the SERCON and/or EOCON.

RFS Guidance for Re-Building

The RFS assists with re-building guidance for communities affected by bush fires. This information aims to improve community resilience through improved design and construction, landscape management, water supply and emergency service access, and is available through the RFS website. It includes tools such as:

- › **Know the level of Risk**- assists with the identification of the Bush fire Attack Level.
- › **The Approval Pathway** assists with the development approval pathway (Development Application or Complying Development).
- › **The Protections Measures**- identifies the protection measures that are required for the proposed development.



Section 6:

APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Functional Area Plans

Functional Area	Plan	Purpose
Animal & Agriculture Services	Agriculture & Animal Services Supporting Plan	Control and co-ordinate arrangements for the provision of services to primary producers, animal holding establishments and animal owners in the community to minimise impact to primary production, ensure animal welfare (excluding native wildlife), and assess impacts to aid recovery.
Education Services		Responsible for liaison with education providers across the State during emergencies, including bush fires.
Energy & Utilities Services	Energy & Utilities Services Supporting Plan	Co-ordinate arrangements for managing severe and sudden disruptions to the supply of energy and utility services due to severe, widespread or unexpected disruptions during bush fires and other emergencies, which requires a significant and co-ordinated response to restore the supply.
Engineering Services	Engineering Services Supporting Plan	Co-ordinate the mobilisation of all engineering resources available effectively and efficiently within the State for emergency response and initial recovery operations, including bush fires.
Environmental Services	Environmental Services Supporting Plan	Focuses on the protection of the environment during bush fires and other emergencies (including inland and State waters) in addition response arrangements for native wildlife during emergencies.
Health Services	Health Services Supporting Plan	Co-ordinate Health support during a bush fire and other emergencies.
Public Information Services	Public Information Services Supporting Plan	Assist with the dissemination of public information in support of a combat agency including bush fires.

Functional Area	Plan	Purpose
Telecommunication Services		Co-ordinate arrangements for managing severe and sudden disruption to telecommunication services due to severe, widespread or unexpected damage caused by bush fires and other emergencies.
Transport Services	Transport Services Supporting Plan	Coordinate transport resources to maintain transport operations and support the combat agency across all stages of an emergency: prevention, preparation, response and recovery.
Welfare Services	Welfare Services Supporting Plan	Co-ordinate the provision of welfare services during a response to and recovery from emergencies, including bush fires.

Appendix 2 – Glossary

AIA	Arrangements for Interstate Assistance
AIDER	Assist Infirm Disabled and Elderly Residents
AIIMS	Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System
ADF	Australian Defence Force
App	Application
AWS	Australian Warning System
BIA	Building Impact Analysis
BICC	Bush fire Incident Coordination Centre (FRNSW)
BFCC	Bush Fire Coordinating Committee
BFDP	Bush Fire Danger Period
BFIL	Bush Fire Information Line
BFMC	Bush Fire Management Committee
BFRMP	Bush Fire Risk Management Plan
BoM	Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology
BFDP	Bush Fire Danger Period
BFIL	Bush Fire Information
Class 1	Class 1 Fire
Class 2	Class 2 Fire
Class 3	Class 3 Fire
CMG	Consequence Management Guide
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPP	Community Protection Plan
EMPLAN	State Emergency Management Plan
EOCON	Emergency Operations Controller
FCNSW	Forestry Corporation of New South Wales
FBI	Fire Behaviour Index
FDR	Fire Danger Rating
FRNSW	Fire Rescue New South Wales
FWW	Fire Weather Warnings
IC	Incident Controller
ICON	Incident Control Online
ICS	Incident Control System

IMT	Incident Management Team
LAT	Large Aerial Tanker
LEMC	Local Emergency Management Committee
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAFC	National Aerial Firefighting Centre
NSP	Neighbourhood Safer Place
NPWS	National Parks & Wildlife Service
NRSC	National Resource Sharing Centre
NSWA	NSW Ambulance
RFS	NSW Rural Fire Service
NSWPF	NSW Police Force
OpsGen	RFS State Operations Centre
OCC	Operational Communications Centre
OMP	Operational Management Procedures
PBP 2019	Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019
PIFAC	Public Information Functional Area Coordinator
PIU	Public Information Line
PMR	Private Mobile Radio
RMG	Resource Managers Group
Section 44	Section 44 of the Rural Fires Act
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
SEOC	State Emergency Operations Centre
SEOCON	State Emergency Operations Controller
SERCON	State Emergency Recovery Controller
SEWS	Standard Emergency Warning Signal
SOC	State Operations Controller
SAD	State Air Desk
TOBAN	Total Fire Ban
TOG	Traditional Owner Group
VHF	Very High Frequency

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