

Rec No	Background Information	Council Recommendation	Minister's Response
Maintaining EPSDD BOP Effectiveness			
1	Council is concerned that a persistent inability to achieve the planned burn goal means that the degree of protection achievable from this BOP activity may be in decline.	That all government mechanisms that contribute to difficulty in meeting planned burning targets be reviewed and streamlined so that, once the EPSDD BOP is approved, the nominated prescribed burns can be implemented in a more timely manner (p7).	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that all government mechanisms that contribute to difficulty in meeting planned burning targets are reviewed and streamlined.</p> <p>However, the primary impediment to implementing burns is predominantly appropriate weather windows over which the ACT Government has no control.</p> <p>Most of the prescribed burning in the ACT is undertaken by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) as part of their legal responsibility for preparedness across EPSDD and TCCS managed land. PCS has dedicated staff looking at weather and fuel and undertakes burning only when it is safe to do so and weather allows.</p> <p>The clear expert consensus following the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements is that while hazard reduction burns are a part of the toolkit, they have a limited impact on reducing fire risk, under extreme conditions.</p> <p>Their effectiveness is reducing even further as climate change makes seasonal conditions more extreme.</p> <p>While planned burning implementation has numerous challenges, PCS continues to look at increased efficiencies in delivering the planned burn program.</p> <p>One area for improvement is in communication and notifications. PCS has allocated resources to the roles of planning, approving, and implementing planned burns with a specific focus around communication and notifications.</p>
Adaptive Management and Climate Change			
2	Council is concerned that there has not been a transparent account and review of the suppression operations of the 2019-20 fires in the ACT.	That the ACT urgently engages appropriately qualified independent expertise to document and review the suppression strategies, responses and bushfire management lessons from the major 2020 bushfires in the ACT (p10).	<p>Completed</p> <p>The operational response provided to our community during the 2019-20 bushfire season meant the ACT was well protected.</p> <p>The ACT Government committed early to reviewing the season to ensure any lessons would bolster our emergency response into the future.</p> <p>The 2019-20 season was subject to several internal and external reviews. ACT Government officials, volunteers, and staff, all had the opportunity to make significant contributions to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements; NSW Bushfire Inquiry; ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety review of ACT</p>

			<p>emergency services responses to the 2019-20 bushfire season; Review of the Whole of ACT Government Coordination and Response during the 2019-20 Bushfire Season; and Independent Report on the ACT Emergency Services Agency Operational Review of the Bushfire Season 2019-20.</p> <p>The independent review provided unbiased and unconstrained analysis of the practices that worked and practices that could be improved.</p> <p>The ACT Government will continue to work with the Bushfire Council, volunteers, staff, and stakeholders to learn from the season and improve our response and preparedness into the future.</p>
A Community that is Prepared for Bushfires			
3	<p>Following the bushfires, the ACT Government conducted a community survey of 823 people to evaluate the reach and effectiveness of its communications messaging in the lead up to, and during, the bushfire emergency of January 2020 in, and adjacent to, the ACT. Of those surveyed, 98% had been aware that the ACT had been in a state of emergency or on alert due to the bushfire situation in and near our border, and 93% felt well-informed. 78% had made some preparation to make their home safer, and 99% had done at least one thing to improve their personal safety. 89% knew what they would do if a bushfire threatened, and 50% had a written or prepared bushfire survival plan.</p>	<p>That ESA adopts a longitudinal approach to evaluation of community education activities to ascertain their effectiveness over time – whether they cause a lasting change in community behaviour (p16).</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The ESA has always adopted a longitudinal approach to evaluation of community education activities to ascertain their effectiveness over time. The ESA has invested in its Public Information and Engagement team, and this is part of their ongoing work.</p> <p>Community surveys such as the one conducted by the ACT Government are important as they provide information on community awareness, as outlined in the ACT Bushfire Council’s Report.</p> <p>However, these types of surveys are just as important to establish how the community prefers to receive their bushfire information, and the main reasons that enabled the community to act. These preferences change over time and it is important that the ESA remains flexible and adaptable in the way in which its community education activities are delivered, and doesn’t rely on a single method to disseminate information.</p> <p>The ESA is currently supporting the University of Canberra to undertake a research project into how the community used social media during the Orroral Valley and Clear Range bushfires.</p> <p>In addition, ESA has representatives on national working groups such as the National Warnings Group and the National Community Education Working Group who monitor and share new research and information in relation to community behaviour.</p>
4		<p>That future bushfire emergency maps in the ACT include a scale and topographic contours, and an indication of which parts of the burnt area are actively burning (p16).</p>	<p>Agreed-in-Principle</p> <p>While this is ‘agreed-in-principle’ it needs to be balanced against the additional time it would take to distribute a map with this much detail during an emergency, and whether the additional information really adds any value to a</p>

			document that is used to quickly inform the community which parts of the burnt area are actively burning.
Effective Firefighting Operations by Skilled and Supported Personnel			
5	The Capability Statement refers to the need to depend on resources from outside the ACT in conditions when fires extend over many shifts. As the 2020 bushfires revealed, little of this assistance was available, and the ESA Operational Review identified that fatigue and the need to draw on less well-trained staff was a significant issue. This is an important lesson for the ACT.	That the Capability Statement be reviewed as a component of Action 9.6 of SBMP4 to take into account a reducing capacity to rely on interstate assistance as the warming climate produces more widespread extreme bushfires (p17).	<p>Agreed</p> <p>This matter will be considered when the Capability Statement is next reviewed, noting that the Capability Statement refers to frontline firefighting resources. The ACT was able to confidently draw on frontline firefighting resources from other jurisdictions during the 2019-20 bushfire season, in line with the Capability Statement.</p> <p>The statement that “The ESA Operational Review identified that fatigue and the need to draw on less well-trained staff was a significant issue” was not in relation to frontline firefighting resources. It was in reference to IMT resourcing.</p>
6	Council believes that the low morale of volunteers and the relationship with RFSHQ is a significant concern. Council is concerned that there are several significant issues raised by volunteers in the ESA Operational Review and in the ACT Assembly Committee Inquiry process, which have not been resolved and are contributing to the ongoing low morale of volunteers. At the time of finalising the Council’s report, Council has not been advised of any measures planned or in place to address this issue.	That an independent review be conducted to consider issues including, but not limited to: the role of ACT volunteer firefighters; the means by which ACT volunteer firefighters are represented and consulted; the effectiveness of communication between volunteer brigades and RFSHQ; and how best to utilise volunteer firefighter skills and experience in the ACT’s unique operational environment (p17).	<p>Completed</p> <p>Our dedicated ACT Rural Fire Service volunteers kept us safe during Australia’s worst bushfire season and protected the territory in unprecedented conditions.</p> <p>The ACT Government is committed to working with volunteers to learn from their experiences, address any concerns and ensure they remain one of the best-resourced, best-equipped and best-trained volunteer firefighting services in Australia.</p> <p>ACTRFS members raise concerns and provide feedback through a number of existing channels including after-action reviews, debriefs and cyclical meetings. Volunteer input is carefully considered alongside all collated feedback and, where possible, feedback is acted on to inform improvements to practice or policies.</p> <p>The ESA has, and will continue, to address matters raised by volunteers during the many recent reviews and inquiries into the 2019-20 season, including the independent ACT Emergency Services Agency Operational Review of the Bushfire Season 2019-20. Progress has been made in delivering the short- and long-term improvements suggested by these reviews, and a number of changes requested by volunteers have been implemented and embedded into ESA operations.</p> <p>Under the leadership of the Chief Officer, the ACTRFS has been going through a reset, which is designed to evolve and shape the ACTRFS as a positive, collaborative, and high performing workforce. This is being done in</p>

			<p>cooperation with the senior management of each Brigade, who have been meeting personally with the Chief Officer. Improved training is one of the matters being considered as part of the ACTRFS Reset, providing members with better opportunities for career progression by teaching them to become leaders as well as firefighters.</p> <p>The ACTRFS has also recently increased its staffing numbers to better serve its volunteers and to enhance their volunteering experience as part of its commitment to continuous improvement.</p>
7	<p>Council has for some time been concerned about the number, and experience, of personnel available to support Incident Management Teams (IMT). While the number of people available to support IMTs is sufficient, Council believes that these teams would benefit from having more bushfire management experience. This would help to ensure that the commitment of resources during large scale bushfires best reflects the risk posed by the potential behaviour of a fire.</p>	<p>That a greater proportion of RFS and PCS personnel undertake IMT training so that they can effectively undertake significant fire management roles (p18).</p>	<p>Agreed-in-Principle</p> <p>The ESA and PCS acknowledge the importance of having personnel with on-the-ground firefighting experience in specialist IMT roles, such as the Operations and Planning functions.</p> <p>Volunteers will be provided more opportunities throughout the year to undertake various forms of training for operational and non-operational activities, including IMT training.</p> <p>An IMT is made up of multi-skilled personnel who can perform efficient and effective roles (i.e. Logistics, Finance, Public Information) within an IMT without the need for on-the-ground firefighting experience.</p>
Extinguish Bushfires when they Occur			
8	<p>Council has regularly stressed the importance of IMTs being led by an experienced bushfire firefighter and has regularly asked about the bushfire management experience of personnel with IMT qualifications. This information has not usually been supplied and Council remained concerned about the capability to operate a full IMT “for the first two shifts”.</p> <p>Further, it is evident from the apparent under-utilisation of some volunteer brigades in the 2019-20 bushfires that there may be some longer-term benefit in reviewing the way in which volunteer firefighters are trained, located and deployed.</p>	<p>That the response to major bushfires should always be directed by someone with significant bushfire fighting experience (p20).</p>	<p>Agreed-in-Principle</p> <p>See response to Recommendation 7.</p>

Access for Vehicles and Firefighters to Undertake Bushfire Fighting and Fuel Reduction			
9	<p>Council is now very concerned about the ongoing delays in implementing a strategic burn in the Pipeline Track area (FB092) within Namadgi National Park. This proposed burn, which has been scheduled but not implemented in the past four EPSDD BOPs, covers 1251 hectares and addresses a critical fuel risk in the relevant Strategic Firefighting Advantage Zone. Given its strategic importance, Council considers that this burn must be given priority for implementation in autumn 2021.</p>	<p>That the long-planned prescribed burn (FB092) in the Pipeline Track area be given highest priority for implementation in Autumn of 2021 and that any further non-weather related impediments to the implementation of this burn be resolved by the end of January 2021 (p22).</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>PCS understands this specific burn has been scheduled to be implemented in every year for the past 4 years. Significant ecological issues which prevented the burn have now been resolved, and planning is underway to implement this burn in 2020-21. The burn plan has been prepared and an internal PCS working group has been established to refine the plan with the intention to proceed as soon as there is a suitable weather window. It is predicted that this burn will be implemented mid to late summer or autumn.</p>
10	<p>As with last year, Council has not been given access to the results from the ESA site audits of the PCS 2019-20 prescribed burning program. This means that Council is not able to provide definitive advice on the effectiveness of the prescribed burning program</p>	<p>That ESA ensures that the results of annual field audits of fuel management and road access activities completed by PCS are provided to Bushfire Council by the end of August each year, to inform Council's annual report to the Minister (p23).</p>	<p>Agreed-in-Principle</p> <p>The ACT Bushfire Council is updated on PCS BOP progress at Council Meetings by PCS Fire Management Unit (FMU) staff.</p> <p>ACTRFS will endeavour to provide this information to the ACT Bushfire Council earlier each year, noting that this will be dependent on the timing of a completed final BOP report from the FMU. This would need to be provided to ACTRFS by no later than 31 July each year, which may cause difficulties for FMU given the sufficient time required to conduct field audits of any late quarter activities.</p>
11	<p>Council has for some years been concerned about the adequacy of fire protection for new suburbs on the western and northern sides of the city. Recent risk modelling work undertaken by PCS at Council's request, shows that bushfires under catastrophic conditions would result in some existing Denman Prospect houses being destroyed and that these risks increase in the currently undeveloped areas to the west and north of Stage 1.</p>	<p>That the Minister confirms that all development at Denman Prospect will meet or exceed the ACT's Fire Management Standards and arranges for Council to be briefed on the specific details of Asset Protection Zones and Edge Roads as well as for the agreed hazard mitigation for the red stringybark forest around Blackies Hill (p23).</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The ACT Government agree with the ongoing fire requirements and zoning for the protection of the suburb of Denman Prospect. This area lies on the western side of the ACT, where our risk modelling highlights higher risk areas than other areas in the ACT.</p> <p>ESA and Parks and Conservation Service have been heavily engaged in the planning and development of Denman Prospect since 2014 and continue to be involved. Over this time the ESA has provided advice and formal review of plans and the bushfire protection measures, commensurate to the bushfire threat posed to the suburb.</p> <p>The land manager has also had extensive discussions over a number of years with the development agency and the developer of Denman Prospect. As an outcome of these discussions several aspects were changed and mitigation measures included in the requirements for the development.</p>

			<p>The estate development plan includes a requirement for the developer to undertake physical removal and thinning of vegetation on the native forest area to the west of the Denman Prospect development block.</p> <p>Development has been assessed against existing bushfire hazard and level of construction has been found to meet the requirements of our Strategic Bushfire Management Plan.</p> <p>The protection measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive Asset Protection Zones • bushfire sensitive landscape design • access with the inclusion of edge roads • water supplies • building construction measures, and • emergency planning. <p>These protection measures will help significantly reduce the bushfire risk for Denman Prospect, noting that residents should still consult our bushfire prone area map and have a survival plan in place.</p> <p>The ACT Government will continue to provide briefings to the Bushfire Council on the development of Denman Prospect.</p>
12	<p>Council remains concerned about its inability to understand whether there are any significant bushfire risks to Canberra on lands that are not covered by the EPSDD BOP and that may not be adequately treated. This includes public land managed by the Suburban Land Agency within CMTEDD, ACT Health and JACSD, for which current BOPs have not been presented. It also includes leased land within the Bushfire Abatement Zone that are subject to Farm Firewise Plans, as there is currently no equivalent overarching strategic risk analysis for these rural properties.</p>	<p>That ESA undertakes a comprehensive analysis of all land management BOPs within the ACT to assess the existing risks and adequacy of planned treatments and presents the results to the Bushfire Council by August 2021 (p23).</p>	<p>Agreed-in-Principle</p> <p>The ESA will endeavour to provide this analysis, however it is not possible to meet the timeframe of August 2021 while enabling the ACTRFS to provide an accurate analysis. A more achievable timeline would be the December 2021 Bushfire Council meeting.</p> <p>Directorates and utilities providers draft and submit BOPs around October-November each year. Any analysis produced by ACTRFS during August would either not include Directorate or entity BOPs still to be submitted and approved.</p> <p>The ACTRFS Assistant Director, Strategic Planning Bushfire is currently working on BOP coverage to assess grass fuel loads and possible fire runs. ACTRFS is also undertaking field inspections of grass fuel loads and curing trends on Rural Leaseholds to identify priority response areas.</p> <p>ACTRFS is also undertaking field inspections of grass fuel loads and curing trends to identify priority response areas.</p>

			Directorate BOPs should be presented to BFC by the appropriate directorate, if required, and not ACTRFS. Directorate BOP's should only be presented to BFC after ESA Commissioners approval.
Integrated Bushfire Protection at the Urban Edge			
13	<p>There are two issues of concern to Council relating to the application of bushfire related construction standards in bushfire prone areas. The first and most important one relates to the ACT Government decision in December 2018, when it was agreed to apply bushfire-related construction requirements to all residential dwellings in the Bushfire Prone Area (BPA), including dwellings on the urban fringe that are not currently subject to those requirements.</p> <p>The second issue relates to the currency of the bushfire construction standards that apply to buildings in new bushfire prone areas.</p>	That the ACT Government-agreed national standard for construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas be implemented urgently (p25).	<p>Completed</p> <p>Relevant planning and building codes already refer to the current national standards for construction of building in bushfire prone areas.</p> <p>The relevant provisions of the ACT Territory Plan refer to Australian Standard 3959, and the convention is that the current version of the applicable Australian Standard is used, unless a provision specifically states otherwise.</p> <p>In relation to non-urban areas, the Building (General) Regulation 2008 applies the bushfire provisions of the Building Code of Australia (BCA) to new residential buildings in the non-urban area. The BCA is adopted in the ACT as amended from time to time. The current version of the BCA (2019) references AS3959:2018.</p> <p>EPSDD continues to work with the ESA and Access Canberra on consolidating all bushfire building requirements for the urban and non-urban areas under the Building Act 2004, however, in the interim the latest national standards will continue to apply to construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas.</p>
14	<p>The current ACT Government document that provides guidance to builders still shows that the applicable standard is AS3959.200910. The reason for Council's concern is that the expected life of new residential buildings reaches well beyond the years that will see the full impact of climate change, even with optimistic projections of reducing carbon emissions.</p>	That guidance to builders be updated to reflect the latest version of the relevant standard, AS3959:2018 (p25).	<p>Completed</p> <p>All guidance to the building industry reflects the current standards, which includes that the latest version of AS3959:2018 is adopted in the ACT for new developments and building work in bushfire prone areas. It is important to note that building standards are performance based and so it is not mandatory to demonstrate compliance using AS3959. There are alternative pathways to demonstrate compliance with the bushfire standards.</p>
15	<p>Following its concerns expressed last year about fire risk to the second stage of Denman Prospect, Council requested PCS to use its Phoenix Rapidfire modelling capacity to evaluate the risk of bushfire entering the suburb. Following a presentation on the possible outcomes based on this model, Council maintains its strong concern about the appropriateness and adequacy of bushfire protection</p>	That funding be provided in 2020-21 for an independent assessment of bushfire risks to all urban and proposed urban areas on the western and northern sides of Canberra (p26).	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The ACT Government was recently successful in gaining a 4-year Commonwealth grant (National Partnership Agreement Program) to look at fire related long-term residual risk across all EPSDD managed land in the ACT. The funding made available from the Commonwealth will enable EPSDD to also consider residual risk across all tenures to the north and west of the ACT including land in NSW managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.</p>

	measures for the new suburb of Denman Prospect and in particular, that multiple existing houses at Denman Prospect could be destroyed in the event of a bushfire under catastrophic conditions.		
Supported Communities for Bushfire Recovery			
16	<p>The recovery from the 2019-20 bushfires has provided an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of SBMP4 and the Recovery Sub Plan, and to identify any potential issues or concerns as the 2020-21 bushfire season approaches. Council has noted some common concerns across the reports and identifies three key areas where there are opportunities for improvement as the ACT prepares for the 2020-21 bushfire season:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement with rural landholders • activation of recovery processes, and • support for recovery planning. 	That all relevant agencies clarify their responsibility for post-fire recovery for rural landholders in the ACT and address any critical outstanding issues arising from the 2020 fires. It is suggested the Rural Landholders Association be involved in these discussions (p28).	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The ACT Government has been proactive in offering support to fire affected rural landholders. The Rural Services Branch within EPSDD will continue to facilitate a process with the relevant ACT Government Stakeholders and the Rural Landholders Association to document the Government response to post fire recovery for rural landholders and clarify the respective responsibilities. In doing so this process will serve also as a “gaps analysis” that the government can focus on for future recovery efforts.</p>
17	While individual agencies have effectively undertaken their role in recovery, it is Council’s view that the Recovery Coordinator role is critical in providing clarity during the transition from initial to ongoing recovery, as well as ensuring all aspects of recovery are addressed and coordinated.	That priority be given to recommendation 33 of the Coordination Report which addresses the handover arrangements for short term and longer term recovery and ensures that protocols are in place for the appointment of a Recovery Coordinator for all Level 3 bushfire incidents and for Level 2 incidents when appropriate (p28).	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The ACT Recovery Committee has revised its Terms of Reference to elevate the level of membership. The Chair has also been elevated to DDG Community Safety JACS with the new Terms of Reference identifying the Chair as the Recovery Coordinator position unless delegated to a more appropriate position.</p> <p>The Recovery sub-plan is currently being reviewed to reflect these governance changes. This strengthened governance was in direct response to the lessons learned from the 2019/20 summer season. SEMB is prioritising the finalisation of the Recovery sub-plan review in two phases, with the governance changes to be updated as soon as possible, and a more detailed review to follow in 2021.</p>
18	Council notes that in the Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry published on 31 July 2020, item 5.10.1.6 (pp. 379-80) highlights that “Aboriginal peoples were not well-supported during evacuation in some communities”. Council believes that a specific relief and recovery strategy be	That an Indigenous relief and recovery strategy be developed in consultation with relevant Indigenous bodies including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (p28).	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The Fire Recovery Team have met with the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee to seek their guidance, advice and decisions on recovery processes and to provide regular updates. As per legislative requirement under the ACT Heritage Act, Representative Aboriginal Organisations have been</p>

	<p>developed, responding to the needs of Indigenous peoples in the ACT to ensure that, in the event of a large bushfire, they are supported in a culturally safe and proper manner.</p>		<p>engaged in consultation and site visits regarding the protection and management of cultural heritage.</p> <p>EPSDD and the Fire Recovery Team will continue to engage with the Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee and the Representative Aboriginal Organisations on the recovery process.</p>
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