

## Priority Fuel Management Areas (PFMAs)

*This document has been prepared to support community engagement on development of the Priority Fuel Management Areas through the Strategic Bushfire Management Planning process. As such they are not the final version and will continue to be updated.*

### **Q1. What are Priority Fuel Management Areas (PFMAs)?**

**A.** Priority Fuel Management Areas (PFMAs) show where bushfire fuel treatments will most effectively reduce long-term bushfire risk to communities. These areas cross both public and private land tenure and form part of bushfire management strategies.

### **Q2. What are bushfire fuel treatments?**

**A.** Bushfire fuels include anything that can burn in a bushfire, such as dried grass, shrubs, branches, sticks, bark and leaf litter. Bushfire fuel treatments can include activities such as slashing, physical removal, grazing, mulching and planned burning. The choice of treatment will depend on the area's risk, vegetation types, land use, community preferences and other values that are important. Not all land within PFMAs can or should be treated. Fuel treatments planned as part of PFMA implementation can only occur with the landowner's consent. Treatments may be carried out by an individual landowner, a community planning together, and/or fire agencies such as the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic).

### **Q3. Will all the PFMAs need to be burned or treated every year?**

**A.** No. Parcels of land within PFMAs do not need to be treated every year. Fuel treatments are planned based on current fuel levels and ecological considerations. Some treatments may be annual (such as slashing) or periodic (such as planned burning). The treatment choice will depend on the vegetation type, land use, feasibility of treatment options and landowner's preference. Treatments can be delivered to meet a range of objectives from protecting life and property through to a primarily ecological focus. Frequency of fuel treatment is varied to create mosaics of treated and untreated areas. This enables each patch of vegetation to recover in between treatments. The varied frequency of fuel treatment across the landscape is used to protect values that are important to the local community and manages plant and animal habitats within these areas.

#### **Q4. Does a PFMA represent bushfire risk in my area?**

**A.** No. PFMA's do not represent bushfire risk. Bushfire risk refers to how likely it is that major consequences will occur from a bushfire, such as houses being burnt down. PFMA's show the areas where bushfire risk can be reduced by managing bushfire fuels. Sometimes, it is most effective to reduce bushfire fuels within high-risk areas. In many cases it is better to reduce fuels before a bushfire can reach a high-risk area. We will also communicate about high bushfire risk areas, once the bushfire management strategies are complete in late 2019.

#### **Q5. Why were PFMA's created?**

**A.** Bushfire risk occurs across both public and private land and the most effective strategy is to target risk across both land tenures. Fuel management actions undertaken on public and/or private land, can often reduce risk to entire communities beyond the land boundary. PFMA's can help guide where in the landscape the best locations are for reducing bushfire risk through fuel management.

#### **Q6. How do PFMA's relate to Fire Management Zones on public land?**

**A.** PFMA's show where fuel management can reduce bushfire risk most effectively, on public or private land. In contrast, Fire Management Zones reflect management intent on public land only. As defined in the Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land (2012), FMZs consider a broader set of strategic management objectives. These can include ecological objectives, as well as the practicalities of fuel reduction in different locations on public land.

#### **Q7. How do PFMA's relate to the Bushfire Management Overlay?**

**A.** The Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) is a planning control that applies to land that may be affected by extreme bushfires. It applies to land within 150 metres of an area of treed native vegetation larger than four hectares (refer to [www.planning.vic.gov.au/bmo](http://www.planning.vic.gov.au/bmo)). The BMO is relevant to planning permit requirements, whereas PFMA status has no relationship to planning permits.

### **Q8. How do PFMA's relate to Fire Prevention Notices?**

**A.** PFMA's help guide planned fuel treatment activities on public and private land to reduce bushfire risk. Fuel treatment activities in PFMA on private land are planned with the landowner's consent and active involvement. PFMA's represent a broad strategy to reduce bushfire risk in the landscape. In contrast, Fire Prevention Notices are issued when a property has been assessed for fire hazards and the landowner needs to reduce bushfire fuels to reduce an immediate potential fire risk. Fire Prevention Notices are designed to reduce radiant heat, fire intensity and ember attack and minimise direct flame impact to private land and neighbouring assets. They are consistent with CFA guidelines for protecting homes. Please speak to your local council for advice on this topic.

### **Q9. How does the PFMA affect me?**

**A.** If your property is in or near a PFMA, you may want to consider talking to your local CFA District Headquarters or local council about managing fuels on your land. Groups or community events may be occurring in your area and planning how and where fuel management could be undertaken. Being in a PFMA does not mean you are required to manage bushfire fuels on your land. There is no legal obligation for you, your council or fire agencies to reduce bushfire fuel on your land because it is in or near PFMA.

### **Q10. If I am in a PFMA can I clear land to reduce fuels?**

**A.** PFMA's are not zoning or planning scheme overlays. They do not confer any exemptions from land clearing, land or vegetation management legislation, regulations and permits. All fuel management actions, including but not limited to land clearing and planned burning must be carried out in line with relevant legislation and regulations including the Planning Scheme. Please speak to your local council for advice on this topic and check <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/home> for information about the planning scheme for your property.

### **Q11. Can I treat the fuel myself?**

**A.** Yes, if you want to and by adhering to all relevant legislation, regulations and permits. Your local council will be able to help tell you what the Planning Scheme rules are for your area. Your council and local CFA District Headquarters may also be able to suggest what the most effective fuel treatment option for your property is. There may be council incentive programs or community and agency-led activities occurring in your area that you can be involved in.

**Q12. What if I am in a PFMA and we've just had a bushfire?**

**A.** The implementation of any fuel treatments should always consider local bushfire risk and history. If a large bushfire has been in your area, it may be that enough fuel has been treated by the bushfire and no extra fuel treatments are needed now. The remaining unburnt vegetation may be providing important habitat for native species affected by the fire. If you had a plan to treat fuels on your property before the fire, you should check with the local CFA District Headquarters or council on what treatment, if any, is needed now.

**Q13. There is an environmental covenant on my property and I am in a PFMA, what happens?**

**A.** PFMA's do not need fuel management activities to occur on every property within them. It is your choice, if you would prefer not to do any fuel management due to your covenant or for any other reason.

If you are interested in undertaking fuel management, refer to the specific requirements of your covenant. You could also consult with the covenant agency, your CFA District Headquarters, Council, or the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for advice on the most appropriate fuel management treatment for the protection of environmental values.

**Q14. What happens if I am in a PFMA and the land cannot be treated, or nothing is being done?**

**A.** Not all land covered by a PFMA will be treatable with fuel management. Fuel management on private land may not be practical or desirable for a range of reasons, including landowner preferences for non-fuel management risk treatments, characteristics of the land, finance, resources or capability. Other strategies for risk treatment include:

- fuel management on public land
- community education on how to prepare for and what to do in the event of a fire
- fire prevention activities, and
- ongoing investment in resources for fire agencies to be able to respond to fires.

Land that is not suitable for fuel management will not be subject to treatment. PFMA's are large landscape scale areas, and fire agencies or communities may be implementing fuel management in other locations within the PFMA.

**Q15. Where can landowners find more information on PFMA's and managing fuels?**

**A.** More information about fuel management and bushfire risk can be found at the CFA website <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au> Please contact your local CFA District Headquarters or local council to learn more about managing fuels on your land and fuel management in your area.

**Q16. If I am not in a PFMA can I still get help with fuel management?**

**A.** Yes, if you are concerned about fuel risk on your property or would like more information, please contact your local CFA District Headquarters or your local council.