Phase Two Engagement Summary

Background

The Hume region Strategic Bushfire Management Planning (SBMP) process has been informed by fire agencies (including Forest Fire Management Victoria and CFA), Local Government and Emergency Management Victoria.

We have built on the extensive knowledge and experience that exists within bushfire management agencies and communities. Our engagement activities are creating conversations with key community members and other stakeholders which is helping us understand how we can all work together to improve bushfire management regardless of land tenure. The development of the Hume Strategic Bushfire Management Plan which covers the entire area of North East Victoria (refer to Hume boundary in Figure 1) complements Municipal Strategic Fire Management Plans.

This document provides a quantitative and qualitative summary of the community feedback received during phase two of our engagement on the Engage Victoria website.

The summary of the feedback received in the phase one of the online consultation can be found on Engage Victoria at https://engage.vic.gov.au/bushfire-planning

Engagement Process

This is the second of four planned opportunities for the community to provide online feedback using the Engage Victoria website on elements on the Hume SBMP process.

There are other opportunities to engage with the planning process including commenting on plans and programs and a Strategic Bushfire Advisory Reference Group. This group includes stakeholders such as apiarists, vignerons and other land managers that have been appointed to provide more detailed input and feedback to Safer Together committees in Hume region.

Engagement Approach

An online survey was developed to collect feedback from the community to consider how we might prioritise risk in the landscape. This included bushfire risk and fuel accumulation on private and public land and other factors including predicted summer weather conditions and proximity to bushland which are elements regarded as important to reduce the risk of bushfire threat to individuals, communities and the environment.

We understand that some communities and groups of people are more vulnerable to bushfire than others, including those who lack experience of bushfire, summer visitors, people with disabilities or illness, the elderly and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. There is also an understanding that some places are more at risk of bushfire than others. The process of strategic planning will guide our responses to bushfire risk to ensure that those places, communities and assets most at risk of bushfire are prioritised for mitigation and management.

We respect and acknowledge that communities consist of individuals who have their own specific experiences and personal opinions that can be drawn upon to seek guidance for future strategic bushfire management planning.
Promotion

The Engage Victoria survey was promoted on social media including sharing by partner agencies involved in the planning process, such as DELWP, CFA, Parks Victoria, EMV and Local Government. An email link was sent to community groups and individuals with an interest in bushfire management that had provided their details to agencies for this purpose. A media release was sent to media outlets throughout the Hume region footprint and postcards which called for comments were circulated.

Figure 1 shows how respondents found out about phase two consultation with results shown as a percentage of the overall respondents. The three highest sources were via My CFA notification (27%), social media (26%) and via fire agency/partner websites (16%). Approximately six percent of individuals who completed the phase one survey, also completed phase two.

![Figure 1: Percentage breakdown of how respondents were informed by the phase two consultation.](chart.png)

Participants

172 surveys were completed in the phase two survey in Hume region. Nine surveys were completed by individuals who currently reside outside the region but own property within the Hume boundary (outlined in blue in Figure 2). The distribution of respondents via postcode is shown in Figure 2. The highest number of responses were received from Jamieson (postcode 3723 – with 19 responses), with between 6 and 18 received from Mansfield, Benalla, Beechworth, Tallangatta and Wodonga localities.
Figure 2. Graph of survey respondents based on the postcodes given. Dots shaded in red and orange represent most frequent postcodes received. Dots shaded in grey show between 1-5 responses for this postcode.
Comparing where respondents live with their perceived level of bushfire risk

Figure 3 graphs the results to survey question 6, which asked participants what they perceived their risk of bushfire to be. 86% of total respondents perceived they were in a high (42%) or medium (44%) risk of bushfire impacting their property on an average summer’s day.

![Bar chart showing perceived risk levels](chart.png)

*Figure 3: Level of perceived risk of a bushfire impacting property on a typical summer’s day*

Relationships between the perceived level of risk and where respondents indicated they live in the landscape (questions 2 to 6) are summarised in Table 1. Compared with respondents who indicated that they were at low risk of bushfire, respondents with a high perception of risk typically:

- live in a rural area;
- own a property more than 4 hectares in size;
- are 10 times more likely to be located near public land; and
- are 6 times more likely contain forested private land on their property.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions 2-6: Where do you live?</th>
<th>% total respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within a township</td>
<td>High Risk Medium Risk Low Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 18 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outskirts of town</td>
<td>10 18 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rural area</td>
<td>46 38 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>property less than 4 hectares</td>
<td>34 44 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>property more than 4 hectares</td>
<td>38 31 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>property adjacent to public land</td>
<td>31 28 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>property not adjacent to public land</td>
<td>41 47 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>property with significant privately forested land</td>
<td>19 10 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>property without significant privately forested land</td>
<td>53 65 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not sure if property has significantly privately forested land or not</td>
<td>2 1 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Relationships between respondents’ perception of levels of risk to bushfire and where they live in the landscape (survey questions 2 to 6).*
In considering risk from bushfire on public and private land, survey question 8 asked respondents to indicate which fuel management activities (e.g. planned burning, slashing, mulching, mowing, spraying and grazing) should be conducted to address to the five key strategic bushfire management planning objectives. Results show that respondents regard the protection of people and where they live, work or holiday, critical infrastructure and water catchments as the three highest objectives (Figure 4). There was greatest divergence of opinion as to the importance of the minimising the economic impacts (e.g. smoke) from bushfire, with approximately one third of respondents remaining neutral (24%) or indicating this is not at all important (8%) for future planning objectives (Figure 4).

![Figure 4: Summary of survey question 8, which asked for feedback on the importance of fuel management activities against five key strategic bushfire management planning objectives for Hume region.](image)
Managing vegetation on private land

The feedback from private land section of the survey will inform the development of strategic bushfire management approaches on private land and how fire agencies and land managers can better partner with community to reduce bushfire risk. It is important to note that in considering the development of approaches to managing fire risk on private land, our strategic approach is about identifying where risk is greatest and where mitigation activities might be prioritised.

The graph shown in Figure 5 demonstrates the extent to which respondents feel different stakeholders are responsible for managing bushfire fuels on private property, including their own property (survey question 9).

Figure 5: To what extent respondents feel different stakeholders are responsible for managing bushfire fuels on private property.

Ninety percent of respondents indicated that they were either solely or mostly responsible for managing bushfire fuels on their private property. Conversely, approximately twenty percent of respondents indicated that fire agencies, local council and the community in general are not at all responsible for managing bushfire fuels on private property (Figure 5).

Survey question 10 asked for feedback on the actions they undertake to reduce bushfire fuels on their property. A summary of feedback is shown in Figure 6. Findings indicate that:

- 84% respondents undertake management actions to reduce bushfire fuels on their property (e.g. mowing, slashing and mulching).
- Half the number of total respondents undertake burning off vegetation on their property.
- 13% percent of respondents said they do not have bushfire fuels on their property, with 2% stating they did not manage these fuels at all due to circumstances of being a rental property.
Figure 6: Proportion of respondents that report undertaking a range of management actions to reduce bushfire fuels on their property. Note that respondents could answer multiple activities.

Figure 7 shows the likelihood of respondents to reduce bushfire fuels on their own property. The results show that 69% of respondents were ‘extremely likely’ to reduce bushfire fuels on their property.

Figure 7. How likely respondents are to reduce bushfire fuels on their own property.
Figure 8: To what extent respondents expect their fellow community members to reduce fuel loads on their properties.

Figure 9 displays what support respondents reportedly need to manage bushfire fuels on their property. Results show varied needs across the support activities listed. While there was no single standout action preferred, one-third of all respondents indicated they would not need any advice or support, or seek self-service information, where they can review this information themselves.

Figure 9: What support respondents need to manage bushfire loads on their property.
When survey participants were asked if they see the benefits of land managers and fire agencies considering forested private land in their fuel management planning, 90% indicated that they would see a benefit, compared with 7% who didn’t (Figure 10).

![Figure 10: Benefits of land managers and fire agencies considering forested private land in fuel management. Results are shown as a percentage of total responses received.]

When asked to what extent does vegetated or forested private land contribute to overall fire hazard, 78% said that it contributes 'a great deal' (41%) or a 'moderate amount' (37%), compared with 5% of respondents who said it rarely (3%) or never (2%) contributes to overall fire hazard (Figure 11).

![Figure 11: Extent that vegetated or forested private land contribute to overall fire hazard. Results are shown as a percentage of total responses received.]

Thirty-four percent of respondents rated the current effectiveness of the fuel management on public land as three out of five stars, with 16% each for one star, two stars and four stars (Figure 12).

Figure 12 Rating of overall effectiveness to the current approach to fuel management on public land. Results are shown as a percentage of total responses received.

Figure 13 displays respondent reported interest in bushfire management in the Hume region. From the 172 completed surveys received, 90% live in the Hume region, and almost half have a previous experience of bushfire and 25% being an emergency services volunteer.

Figure 13: Respondents reported interest in bushfire management in the Hume region. Note that respondents could answer multiple items in this question.
The survey asked for further ideas or comments on how to reduce the risk of bushfire to communities (question 18) and greater than 98% of respondents provided a comment or feedback, which was excellent. Common themes groupings (where possible) are listed below:

1. **Improvements to high-level strategic planning, fuel management-related activities and enforcements by local government agencies.**
   Concerns on a wide range strategic planning controls, fuel management related activities and enforcements were raised by 35 respondents (representing 21% of the total comments received). Topics included:
   I. Changes to planning regulations so that housing developments in high bushfire risk areas are better considered.
   II. Increased numbers of fire breaks around towns as well as small strategic fire breaks rather than wholesale burning of private or public or native blocks.
   III. Roadside management: reducing fuel loads, better maintenance, improved access and allowing the public to remove of fallen tree branches.
   IV. Increased penalties for fire-related offences, such as arson, unattended campfires on total fire ban days.
   V. Less council regulations and permits allowing property owners more freedom to manage their fuel loads.
   VI. New rules to encourage residents to be more accountable for managing their own fuels so that they do not place their neighbour’s property at risk.

2. **Ecosystem and social considerations with regards to planned burning: reducing bushfire risk while avoiding detrimental effects to native plants and animals.**
   Concerns about the excessive burning and clearing of vegetation was mentioned by 20 respondents, 12% overall. Comments received stated that the overuse of management techniques, including fuel reduction and prescribed burns were degrading the ecosystem and changing the type of vegetation through prevention of regeneration. There was also suggestion for better use of forest silvicultural practices to create a mosaic of forest ages to improve the resilience of forest plants. Four comments received also expressed social concerns of smoke pollution to human health, tourism and the vigneron industry, who often harvest their grapes at the same times planned burns are implemented.

3. **Targeted bushfire education and communication focussed on bushfire risk, responsibilities and training opportunities.**
   Education and communication around the levels of bushfire risk and responsibilities to the community was mentioned by 16 respondents (10% overall). Many respondents felt that additional targeted information to increase bushfire understanding was important. This was previously mentioned in phase one of the engagement, with respondents suggesting targeting education based on bushfire risk to assist community members with developing realistic plans for bushfire events to ultimately achieve greater fire awareness.

4. **Improved fire agency and local and state government coordination**
   Comments received by 13 individuals (8% overall) shared the same view that fire agencies need be better structured and resourced to deliver more effective fuel management programs and bushfire emergency response. Increased partnership approaches between local councils, state government and agencies was suggested to improve fuel reduction across the broader landscape.
5. Specific feedback on the way which fire agencies currently conduct planned burning/back-burning operations.

Comments encompassing a broad range of views on planned burning practices was received (26 respondents, representing 16% of the total responses received overall). Responses received stated planned burns should:

I. Be a last resort only conducted in regions of highest risk (1 response).
II. Reduced: there is too much planned burning and increased focused needed on alternatives such as weed management and grazing (5 responses).
III. Increased: fire agencies should significantly increase planned burning opportunities in strategic locations to reduce the risk of large bushfires causing significant damage (18 responses).

6. Traditional burning practices should be better incorporated into bushfire management.

There was an interest from ten respondents (6% overall) to utilise and learn more about traditional burning practices. Utilising traditional burning practices in the management of both public and private lands was suggested as an alternative to current planned burning methods used by fire agencies. Respondents indicated these practices as restorative to the ecosystem and promoting of indigenous plant species more effectively than current planned burning practices.

7. Re-introduction of cattle into the High Country to reduce fuel loads

Eight respondents (5%) would like cattle grazing to be re-introduced to the high country to reduce bushfire risk in mountain areas where fire agencies would find most difficult to reduce bushfire fuel loads.

8. Positive feedback on current effort of fire agencies current to keep communities safe

There were three people who commented that “Agencies are doing a terrific job in managing fires as soon as they start – this significantly reduces risk to communities”.
Next Steps
Survey results will be used by the Hume Safer Together planning committees to help inform our strategy development, where we are developing fuel management options based on the following key themes:

- public land fuel management strategy, including revised fire management zoning;
- priority fuel management areas on both private and public land;
- the preservation of human life and property, critical infrastructure, water catchments, ecological impacts, reduction of smoke-related impacts, and
- minimising impacts on fire-sensitive plants, animals and vegetation communities from fire.

The next stage of engagement will provide members of the public the opportunity to provide feedback on the bushfire management strategies currently being developed. There will be further opportunities to participate in the coming months on Engage Victoria.

The Hume Safer Together Planning committees would like to thank all respondents for taking the time to complete the survey and sharing their experience and expertise in context.

More information
Online: https://www.safetogther.vic.gov.au/understanding-risk
Email: forestfire.planning@delwp.vic.gov.au
Appendix 1: Survey

Phase Two Strategy Consultation

Overview

The Hume region, comprising twelve local government and four Alpine Resort Board areas, contains some of the most at-risk fire landscapes in the world. A feature of the Hume region's landscape is its change in character as it transitions from Murray River floodplains and undulating hills in the west through to the foothills and mountain ranges of the Great Alpine Range, containing the Victorian Alps to the east. This variation in topography and land use greatly influences how bushfires behave, the properties at risk, the types of assets and how we respond to fire.

The fundamental objectives of our new plan are focused on five key themes that were refined from confirmed feedback obtained from our first public consultation phase: read Hume Region Engagement Summary. This aligns with the values and objectives established through previous planning processes, including the development of the three current public land bushfire management strategies and the Hume Regional Strategic Fire Management Plan 2011 – 2021.

We seek your feedback on this approach and the factors that you regard as most important to reduce the risk of bushfire threat to you, your communities and the environment.

We want to know what you think about:

- our current strategic approach to fuel management on public land;
- consideration of how fire agencies might prioritise risk in the landscape into the future, including with regard to climate change;
- how bushfire and fuel accumulation on private land might be considered; and
- ideas you might have to reduce the risk of bushfire to communities.

Your feedback will help inform our strategy development, where we are including fuel management options based on the following key themes:

- public land fuel management strategy, including fire management zoning;
- priority fuel management areas on both private and public land;
- the preservation of human life and property, critical infrastructure, water catchments, ecological impacts, reduction of smoke-related impacts; and
- minimising impacts on fire sensitive plants, animals and vegetation communities from fire.
Strategy Consultation

Figure 1 (below): Map of the Hume region covering over 4 million hectares (55 percent private land, 45 percent public land). Darker blue shaded areas highlight key identified forested areas on private land (approximately 240,000 hectares), lighter blue reflects all public land area (1.7 million hectares).
Q1. What is your postcode?

Q2. Where do you live?
- Within a township
- Outskirts of town
- Rural area
- Other (please specify)

Q3. What size is your property?
- Less than 4 hectares (10 acres)
- More than 4 hectares (10 acres)

Q4. Is your property adjacent to public land (e.g. State forest/National park)?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q5. Does your property have significant forested land greater than 4 hectares (10 acres)?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q6. What do you perceive is the risk of bushfire where you live?
- Low - highly unlikely that a bushfire would impact my home/property
- Medium - not likely but it could impact my home/property on a moderately hot and windy day
- High - high likelihood that a bushfire could impact my home/property on an average summer’s day

Q7. Why did you make this selection?
Q8. Thinking about risk from bushfire and actions to address this risk, please consider the following statement. Bushfire fuel management activities on both public and private land (e.g. planned burning, slashing, mulching, mowing, spraying and grazing) should be conducted to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protect people, where they live, work or holiday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect critical infrastructure, such as powerlines, telecommunications</td>
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<tr>
<td>networks, roads and rail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protect water catchments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protect fire sensitive and important plants and animals from fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimise other economic impacts from bushfire such as smoke impacts</td>
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This section of the survey will focus on bushfire fuel management on private land.

Bushfire fuels include anything that can burn in a bushfire, such as dried grass, shrubs, branches, sticks, bark and leaf litter. Bushfire fuel management can include activities such as slashing, burning, physical removal and mulching.

Your feedback will inform the direction of bushfire management approaches on private land and how fire agencies and land managers can better partner with community to reduce bushfire risk. It is very important to note that under the CFA Act, nothing can occur on your property without your informed consent.

Q9. To what extent do you think the following people are responsible for managing bushfire fuels on private property including your own property?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Not at all responsible</th>
<th>Somewhat responsible</th>
<th>Mostly responsible</th>
<th>Solely responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire agencies (e.g. CFA, FFMVic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q10. What activities, if any do you currently undertake to reduce bushfire fuels on your property?

- Burning vegetation (including burn piles, stubble burns, other burning off)
- Mechanical activities (such as mowing, slashing and mulching)
- Grazing or browsing by animals (manage fuels by eating and/or compacting vegetation)
- Controlling weeds
- I do not manage bushfire fuels my property
- I do not have bushfire fuels on my property

Managing bushfire fuels can reduce risks to your property and the broader community.

Q11. How likely would you be to reduce bushfire fuels on your own property?


Not Rated

Q12. To what extent would you expect members of your community to reduce bushfire fuels on their property?


Not Rated

Q13. What support, if any would you need to manage bushfire fuels on your property?

- I need advice from CFA
- I need advice from my local council
- I would like self service information (e.g. a guidance pamphlet, online fact sheet)
- I need physical help and equipment
- I need support to navigate regulations and permits
- I am a neighbour to public land and I am interested in possibly including my property in public land fuel management works (e.g. planned burns)
- I would not need any advice or support
- Other (please specify)

Q14. Do you see the benefits of land managers and fire agencies considering forested private land in their fuel management planning?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)
DELWP, CFA and Local Government responsible for fire management are increasing their focus on forested private land. Refer to map above of the Hume region outlining these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occassionally</th>
<th>A moderate amount</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Q15. To what extent, in your opinion, does vegetated or forested private land contribute to overall fire hazard?

Q16. Considering effectiveness of the current approach to fuel management on public land, please rate the overall effectiveness of the current approach to fuel management on public land.

Not Rated

Q17. What is your interest in bushfire management in the Hume region?

- I live in the Hume region
- I have a property in the area, but I live somewhere else
- I own/operate a business in the area
- I work in the area
- I’m an emergency services volunteer in the area
- I am a community volunteer in the area (e.g. Field naturalists, ‘Friends of’ group)
- I visit the area frequently
- I visit the area for recreation (e.g. bushwalking, trail riding, camping)
- I have past experience of bushfire in the area
- Other (please specify)

Q18. Do you have any further ideas or comments on how to reduce the risk of bushfire to communities?
Q19. How did you find out about this community consultation?

- Participated in phase one
- Social media
- Regional media – newspaper or radio story
- Advertisement
- Flyer/postcard
- My CFA email
- Agency website (DELWP, CFA, Safer Together or local government)
- Word of mouth
- Email
- Other (please specify)

Optional: Please provide your email address if you would like to receive a direct copy of your submission.
Privacy Collection Notice

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is committed to protecting personal information provided by you in accordance with the principles of the Victorian privacy laws.

Purpose

This Privacy Collection Statement relates to all submissions collected in relation to the strategic bushfire management planning process being conducted across Victoria. Agencies involved in fire management across Victoria have been charged with undertaking a strategic planning process to guide bushfire management actions on public and private land into the future. The agencies involved in this process are Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMViC), CFA, Local Government and Parks Victoria.

Forest Fire Management Victoria is providing administrative services to the consultation. FFMViC is part of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (the Department) and submissions will be managed in accordance with the Department’s Information Privacy Policy. The Department’s Information Privacy Policy can be viewed at www.delwp.vic.gov.au/privacy.

Use of your submission

The information you provide will be made available to the Strategic Bushfire Management Planning Teams involved in the planning process, including representatives from FFMViC, CFA, Local Government and Parks Victoria.

This consultation is intended to give the community an opportunity to be involved in the strategic bushfire management planning process by providing information that informs the development of bushfire management strategies across Victoria. The consultation will be conducted in three phases:

- Phase 1: Strategic planning objectives
- Phase 2: Fire management strategies and actions
- Phase 3: Feedback on final results of planning process

If you freely and voluntarily provide any sensitive information under the Act in your submission DELWP will consider that provision to be consent to collect the information and will then protect it under the Information Privacy Principles in the Act. Sensitive information is information relating to racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, membership of a political association or trade association/union, religious or philosophical beliefs or affiliations, sexual preference or criminal record.

You have the right to access and correct your personal information about you that is held by DELWP. Requests for access should be sent to the Manager Privacy, P.O. Box 500 East Melbourne 3002.