

# Safer Together Project 2.3

## Strategic Bushfire Management Planning

Engage Victoria Summary

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## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to collate the summary information from each phase of the Engage Victoria process. This was undertaken as a part of the engagement for the Safer Together Enabling Project 2.3 Enhancing Strategic Bushfire Management Planning.

## Background

### What is Engage Victoria?

Engage Victoria is the Victorian Government's online consultation platform provided through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. It provides a range of tools to enable the community to readily share their ideas and opinions on a range of issues and topics relevant to Victorians.

Engage Victoria provides the Victorian community an easy way to find information and can be a central point of contact to be involved in government decisions. The site offers a digital way for the public to participate and to have a say in the development of government policies and programs, in addition to other consultation opportunities offered by individual programs, in addition to other consultation opportunities offered by individual programs.

### Why use Engage Victoria for Strategic Bushfire Management Planning?

As part of the strategic bushfire management planning process, all regions designed consultation and engagement opportunities for stakeholders and community members to have input into decisions. Opportunities that are widely available to the broader public can be hard to implement, and so the idea of utilising Engage Victoria to complement more local and targeted approaches was suggested.

The Engage Victoria platform is the designated online engagement hub for Victorian Government consultations and offered a useful solution to design and manage the engagement process. Engage Victoria also offered the opportunity for stakeholders with state-wide interests to more easily provide input into each regional planning process, as well as providing the community easy access to input into one or more regions of interest.

### The Engagement Approach

The approach for Engage Victoria involved three main phases for community to provide comment on, via the portal. Regional teams were supported by a state-wide working group with multiagency representation.

The engagement approach occurred over three phases:

- Phase 1 - Engagement on regional values and objectives
  - Strategy options were developed from regional core values and objectives
- Phase 2 - Engagement on risk assessment and strategy options
  - Included feedback on Phase 2 engagement
  - Grampians region undertook Phase 2b as a part of collecting feedback for Phase 2.

- Phase 2a - Community feedback on Priority Fuel Management Areas (only 3 regions elected to be in this phase)
  - Feedback on Phase 2a engagement
- Phase 3 – Engagement on proposed final strategy

In addition to Engage Victoria, the regional planning teams built on previous collaboration partnerships with community groups and agencies. This included stakeholder groups such as plantation industry, apiarists, Agriculture Victoria, Regional Development Victoria, the Victorian Farmer’s Federation, Landcare, Country Women’s Association, Victoria Police and emergency relief agencies (such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Ambulance Victoria and Australian Red Cross). Many of these groups were notified about the Engage Victoria opportunity and to promote it to their members, in addition to the tailored stakeholder engagement their group already being undertaken.

### Promotion of Engage Victoria Process

Engage Victoria surveys were promoted on social media of partner agencies involved in the planning process such as CFA, Parks Victoria, and local government. An email link was sent to known community groups and individuals with an interest in bushfire management who had provided their details to agencies for this purpose. The survey was promoted using multiple channels, including email, social media, flyers, postcards and articles for community newsletters and various news media. Some of these actions included:

- Hardcopies of flyers posted to CFA brigades in some regions
- Emails and/or text messages from members of the public who had subscribed to regional DELWP/CFA notification lists, such as ‘MyCFA’ and ‘Planned Burn Notification Lists’
- Emails (with flyers attached) to stakeholders, partner agencies and special interest groups (including industry, recreational and environmental)
- Flyers and postcards placed at the offices and community hubs of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Parks Victoria and local government.
- Posts scheduled at regular intervals on agency and local government social media
- Newsletters
- Video shared on social media
- Word-of-mouth at local community events
- Telephone calls
- Distribution of postcards to agency staff and the community
- Radio interviews
- Television news reports

As the Phase 2 survey included questions about private land tenure, regions also promoted the survey at regional agricultural field days, in packages of planned burning notices sent out to landholders adjacent to public land, and via field officers from local industries.

Figure 1: Engage Victoria timeline

## Timeline



Figure 2: Performance summary

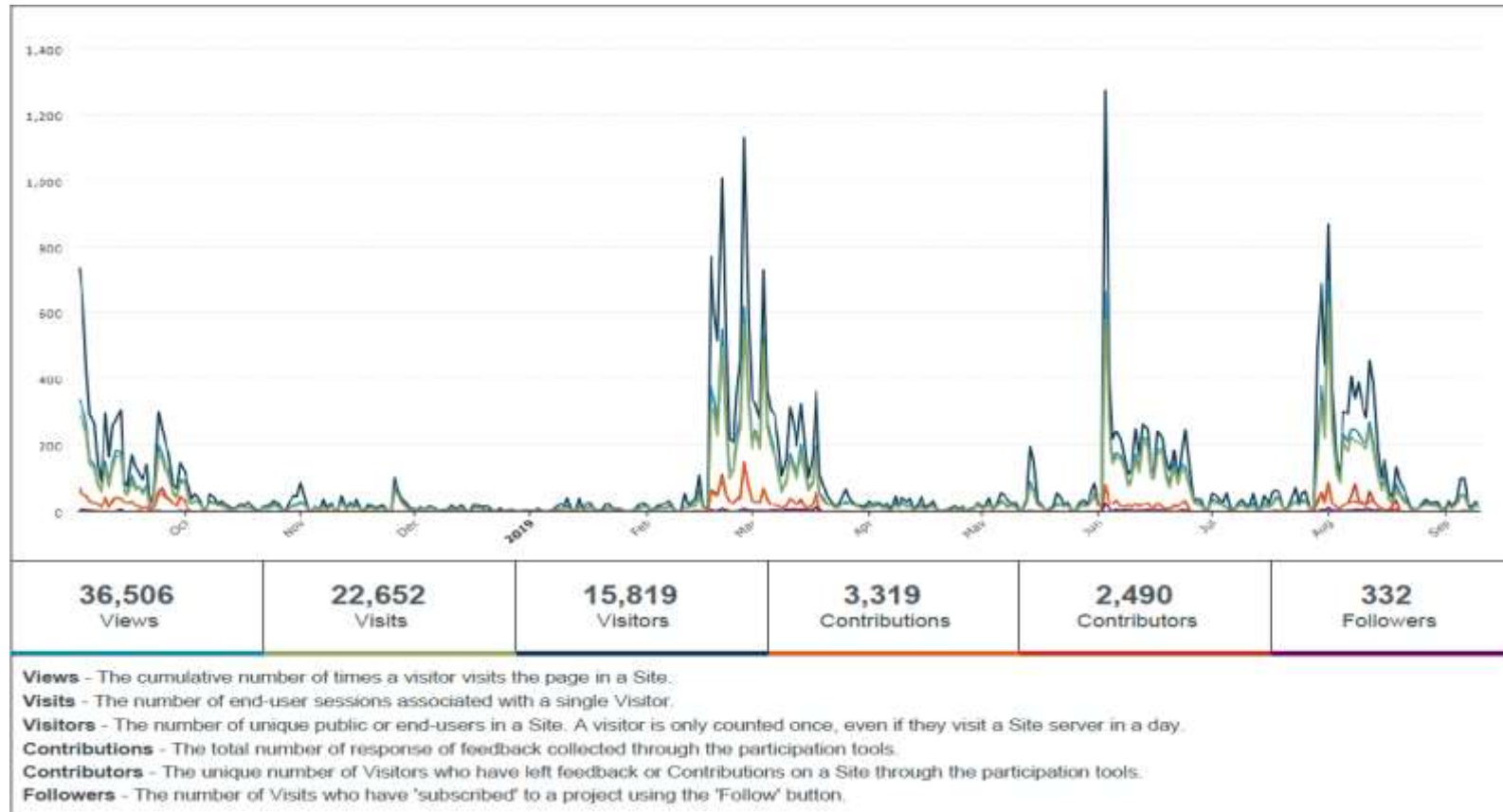


Figure 2 provides a performance summary of the interactivity of the web portal by users. The peaks indicate a high volume of traffic when each phase of engagement was open to the public. The legend explains the different figures. Over the whole period the portal was active there was a count of 15,819 unique visitors to the site.



**Figure 3: Chart of total responses by region**

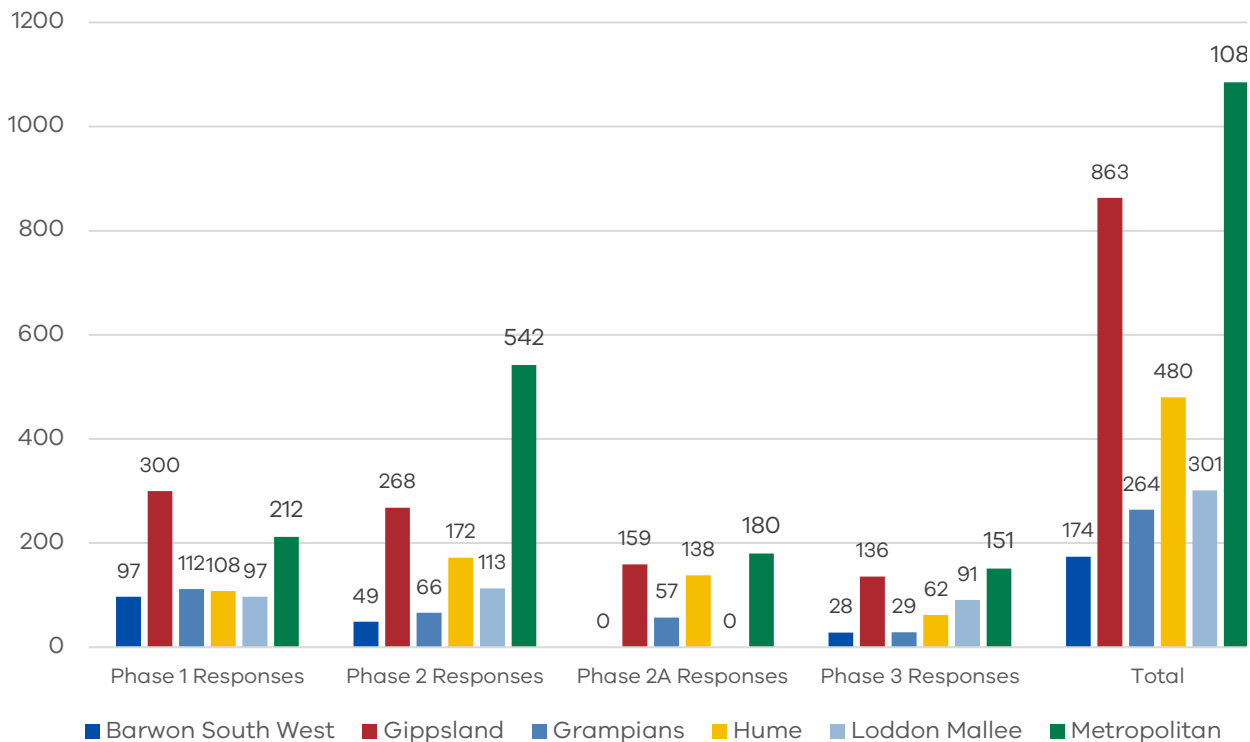


Figure 3 displays the individual number of responses per phase for each region.

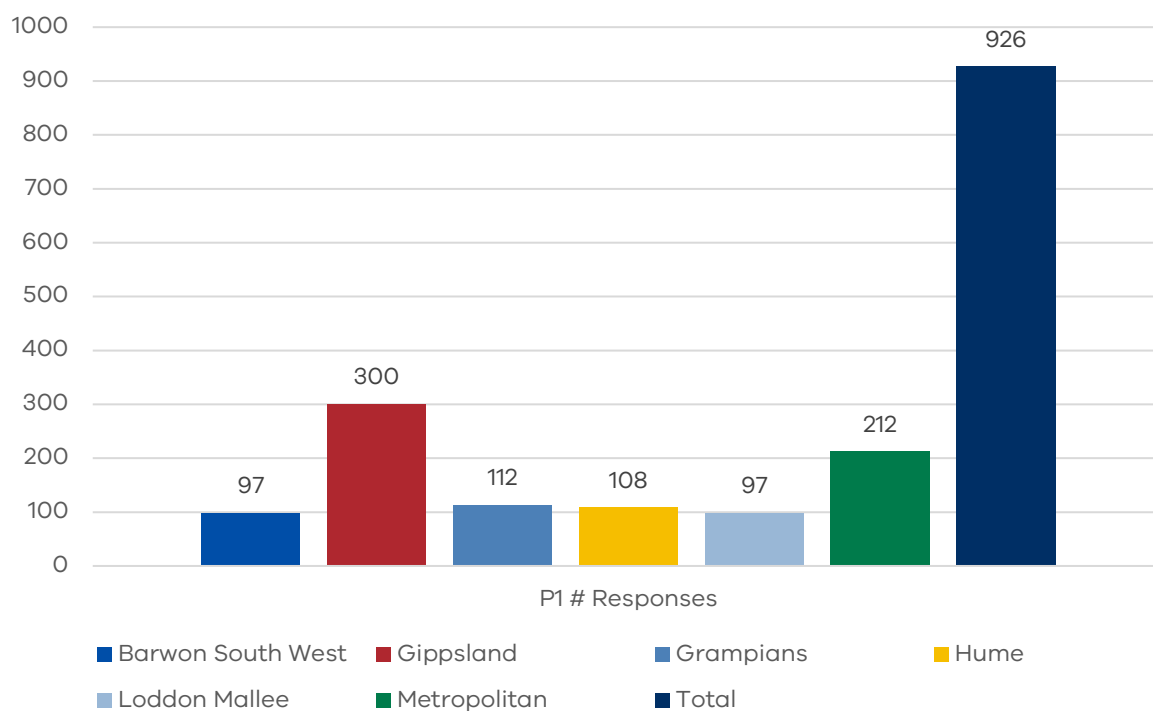
Note: Loddon Mallee, Grampians and Barwon South West did not consult during Phase 2A. However, Grampians ran a separate process not on Engage Victoria, "Phase 2B", which complemented their Engage Victoria responses, and these have been included in the graph in the 2A dataset.

Note: Barwon South West Region undertook a postal survey that received 600 responses. This is not reflected in Figure 3.

## Phase 1

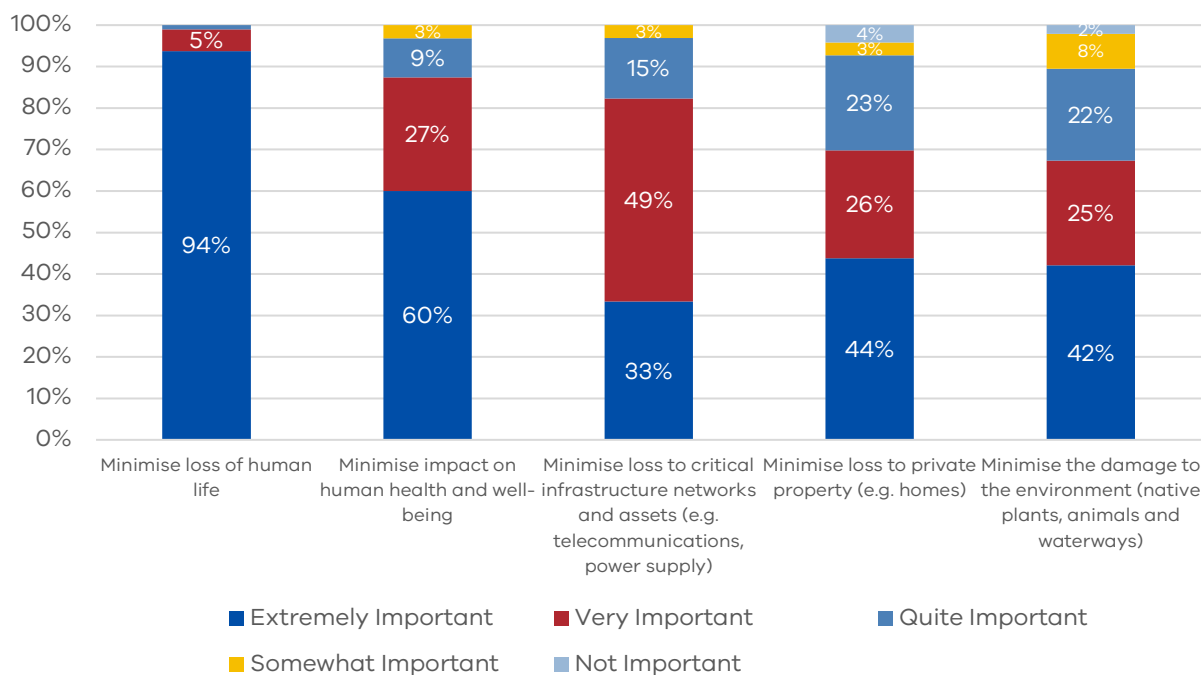
The intent of Engage Victoria Phase 1 consultation was to engage the community more broadly in developing the core values and objectives of the regional Bushfire Management Strategies. The engagement for Phase was open from 3 September to 1 October 2018

**Figure 4: Total of Phase 1 responses by Region**



### Barwon South West Region

97 people responded, more than 40% had previous bushfire experience. The regions engagement approach utilised existing networks and committees, to disseminate the information across the community and stakeholder groups



**Figure 5: Respondents’ ranked importance of Barwon South West’s proposed objectives from phase 1 Engage Victoria.**

The above graph details the importance ratings by respondents for each of the proposed objectives.

#### What the community wanted to see

##### Bushfire Risk Management

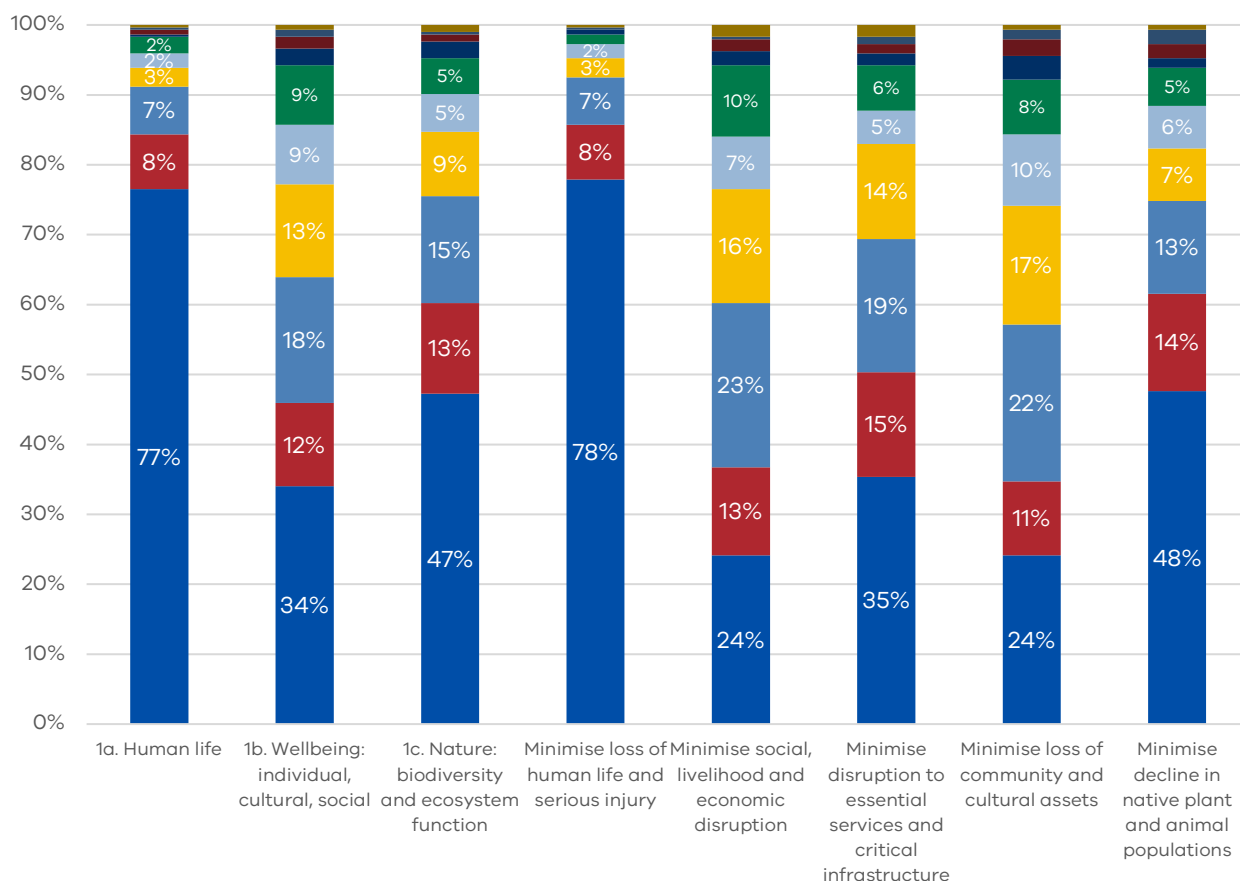
- Cooperation between public and private land managers in managing risk
- Local information about how to prepare private property
- Simpler rules for managing private land vegetation

##### Roadside vegetation management

- Closer cooperation between fire agencies, VicRoads, and local government to improve planning and better use of available funding and resources
- Striking a balance between keeping roads safe and accessible during an emergency, minimising the risk of fire starting along roadsides, managing weeds, maintaining habitat and preserving native grasses

### Gippsland Region

300 people responded, over 65% had previous bushfire experience. The regions engagement approach utilised existing networks and committees, to disseminate the information across the community and stakeholder groups



**Figure 6: Respondent’s ranked importance of Gippsland region’s proposed objectives from phase 1 Engage Victoria.**

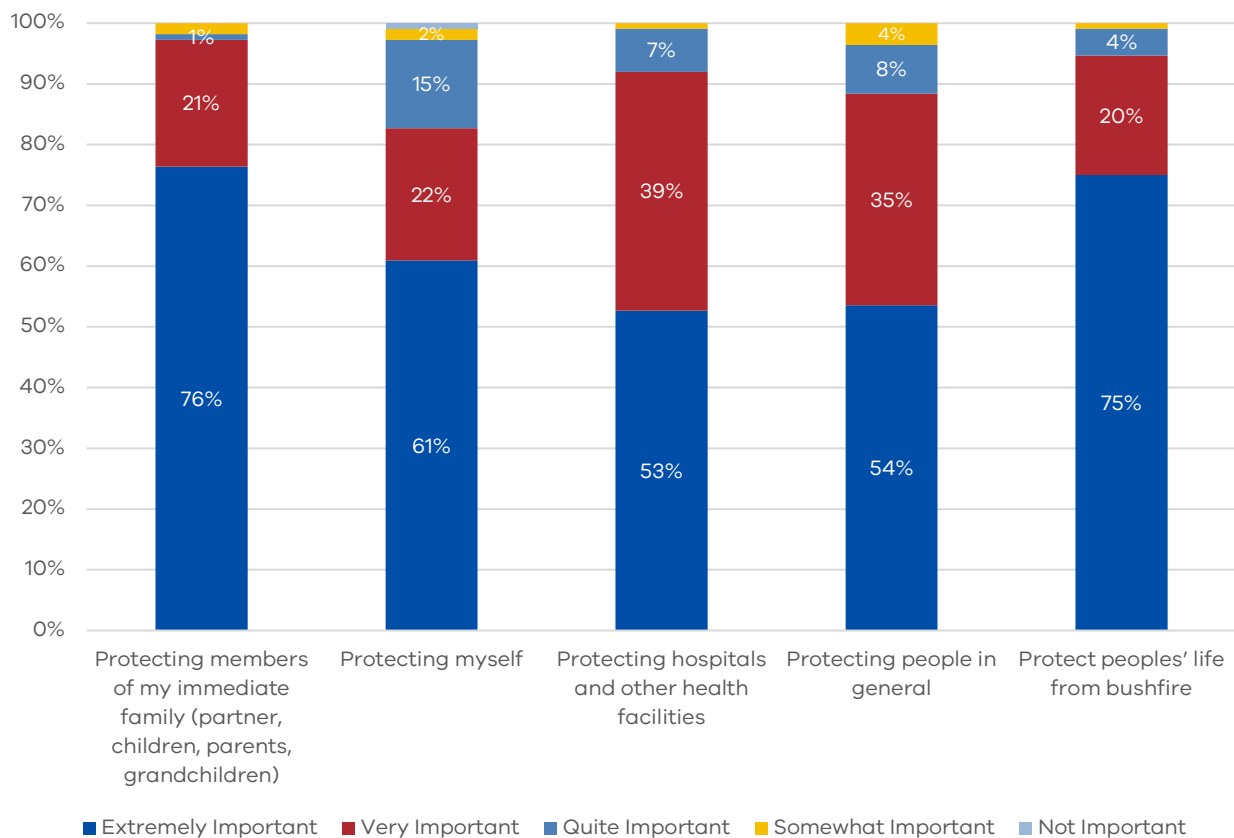
The above graph details the importance ratings by respondents for each of the proposed objectives.

#### Community feedback on importance

- 84% said they needed a bushfire plan, only 76.4% said they had an up-to-date plan.
- The top 3 specific sources of income were from government (23%), private business (18%) and retired/pension (14%). 23% of responses noted all other sources income as the main source.
- The most common recreational activities were bushwalking, camping and day trips.
- Human life was considered the most important value, followed by nature and then wellbeing.

### Grampians Region

112 people responded, more than 60% had previous bushfire experience. The regions engagement approach utilised existing networks and committees, to disseminate the information across the community and stakeholder groups.



**Figure 7: Respondent’s ranked importance of Grampians region’s proposed objectives from phase 1 Engage Victoria.**

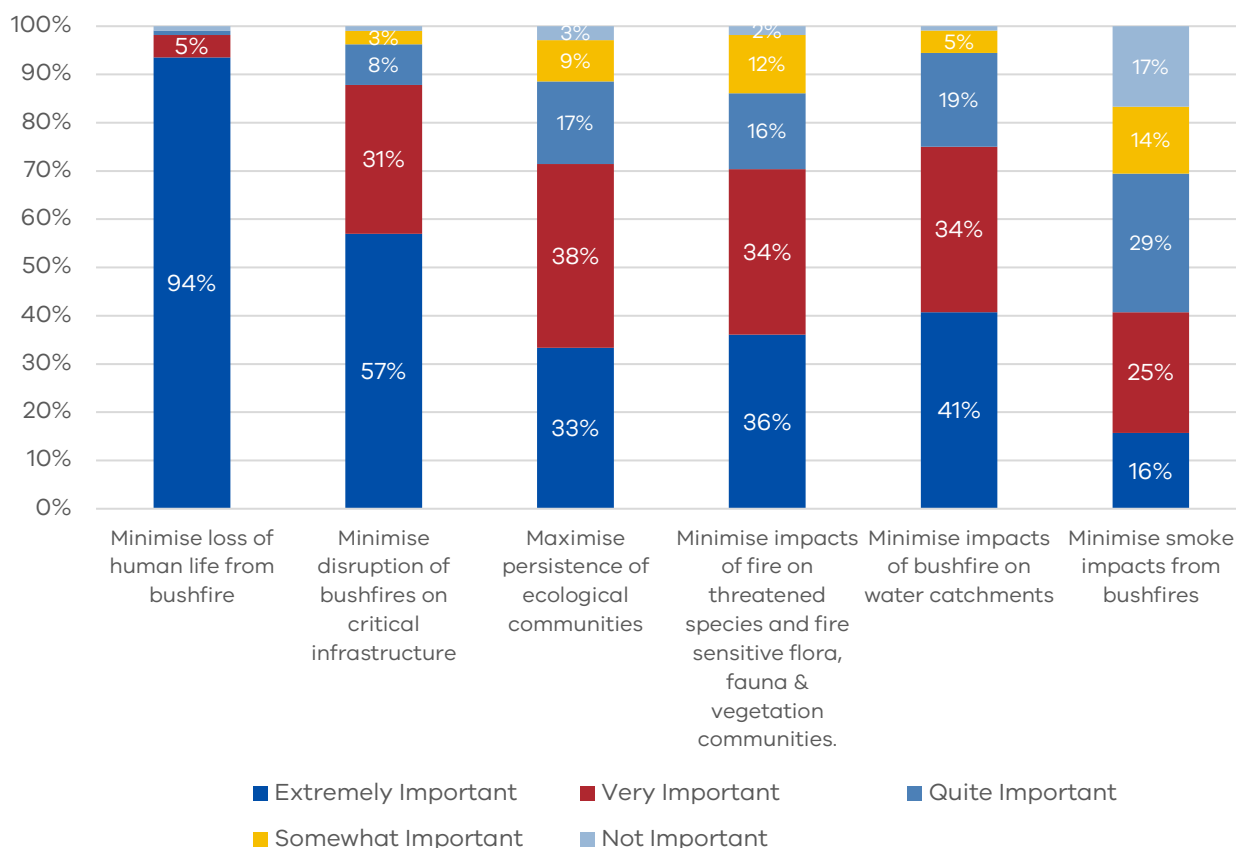
The above graph details the importance ratings by respondents for each of the proposed objectives.

#### Community feedback on importance

- Benevolence was the most important core value identified across the region.
- Protecting human life was the highest priority.
- Management of Infrastructure was the second highest.
- Management of the bush for plants and animals was the third highest.

### Hume Region

108 people responded, more than 44% had previous bushfire experience.



**Figure 8: Respondent’s ranked importance of Hume region’s proposed objectives from Phase 1 Engage Victoria.**

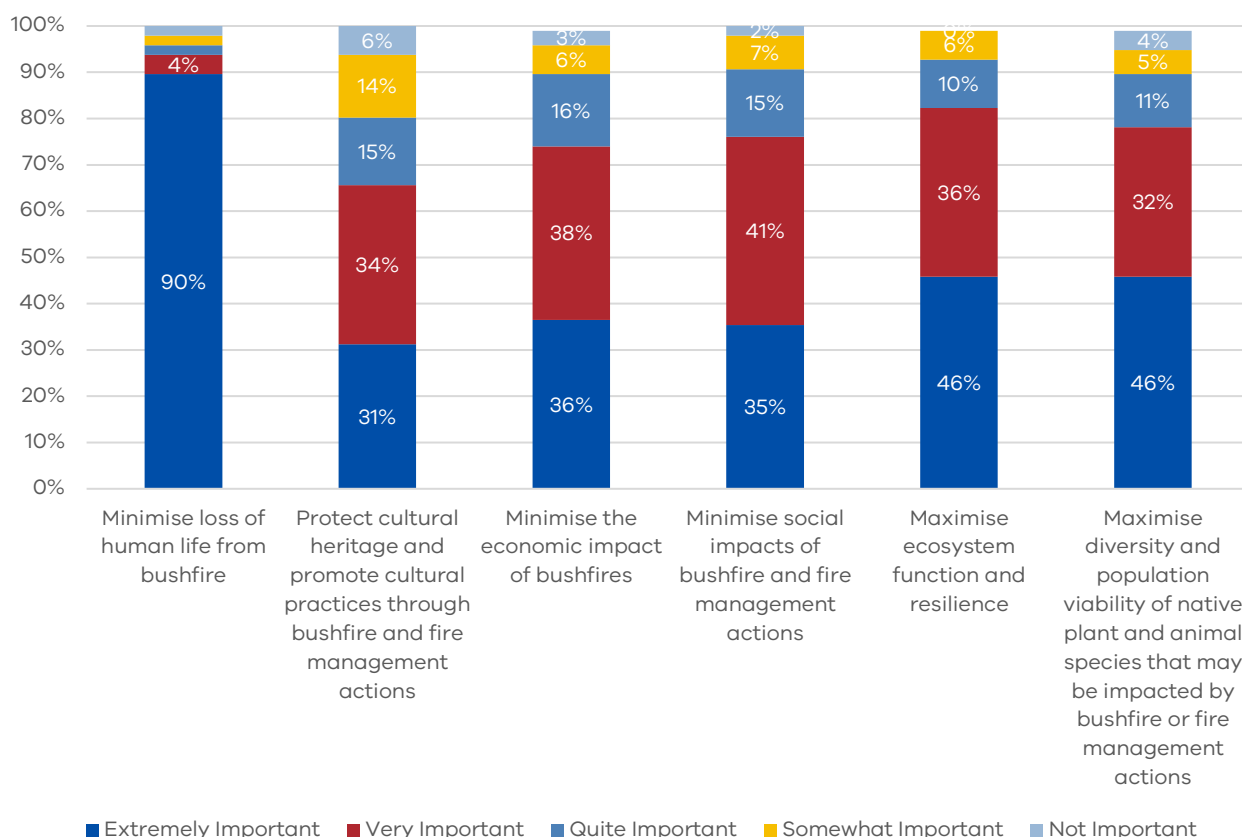
The above graph details the importance ratings by respondents for each of Hume region’s proposed objectives.

#### What the community wanted to see

- Finding the balance between decreasing fuel loads and protecting forest values and ecological communities.
- Improved education and awareness to better understand the bushfire risk and personal responsibility.
- Improved road and track maintenance for safe access and fuel reduction.

### Loddon Mallee Region

97 people responded, more than 40% had previous bushfire experience.



**Figure 9: Respondent’s ranked importance of Loddon Mallee region’s proposed objectives from phase 1 Engage Victoria.**

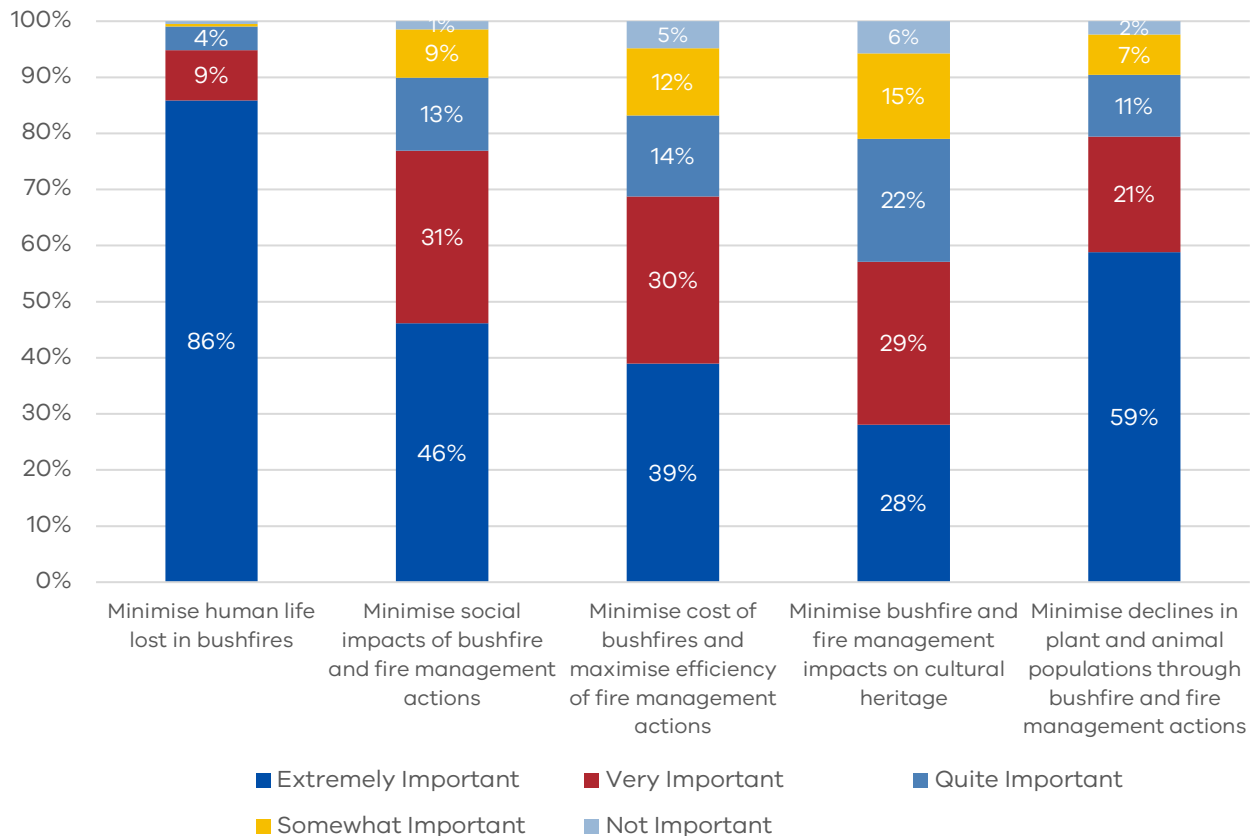
The above graph details the importance ratings by respondents for each of Loddon Mallee region’s proposed objectives.

#### What the community wanted to see

- Better clean-up of fuels on private property.
- Improved collaboration between community, local government and fire agencies to manage bushfire risk.
- Better education and awareness of risk on private and public land.
- Better roadside vegetation management.

### Metropolitan Region

212 people responded, almost 40% had previous bushfire experience.



**Figure 10: Respondent’s ranked importance of Metropolitan region’s proposed objectives from Phase 1 Engage Victoria.**

The above graph details the importance ratings by respondents for each of Metropolitan region’s proposed objectives.

#### What the community wanted to see

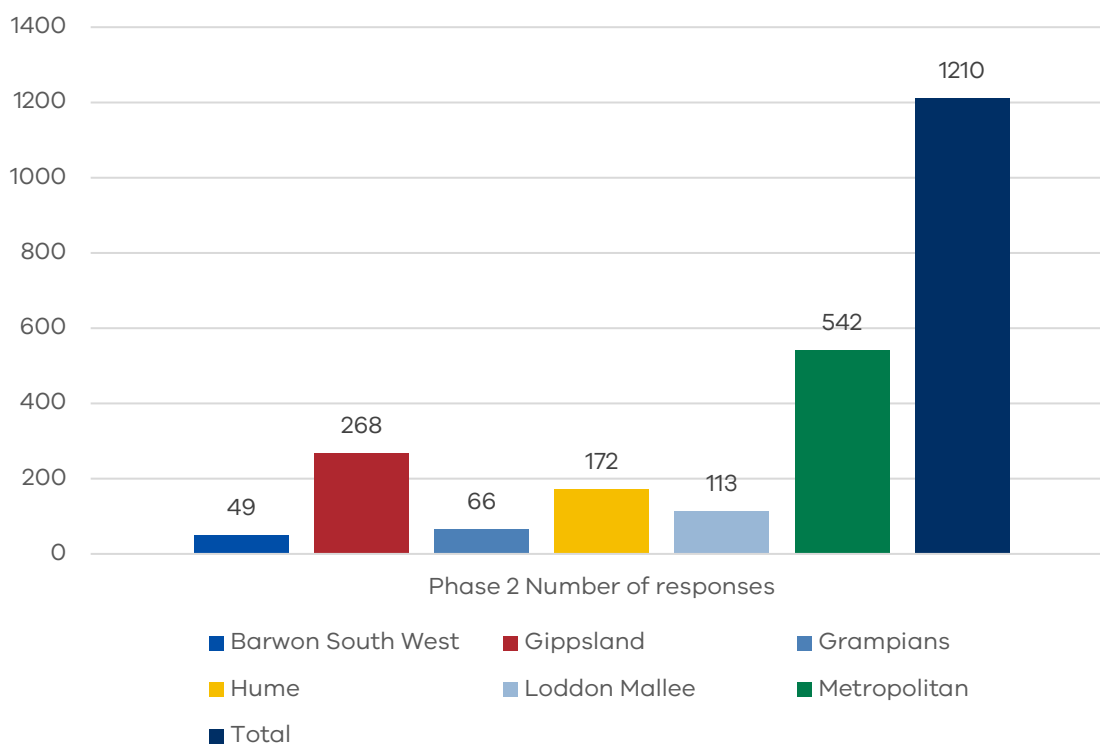
- Better support for land owners to undertake bushfire mitigation.
- Education and information about bushfire risk.
- Long-term evidence-based planning that considers local values.
- Land owners taking responsibility to understand their risk.



## Phase 2

The intent of Phase 2 was to build on the strategy options developed in Phase 1. The fuel management strategies were modelled and presented to the community. The participants were asked to provide comment and preference on each of the strategies. The process was open from the 18 February to the 18 March 2019, and feedback on the engagement was provided in early May 2019.

**Figure 11: Total of Phase 2 responses by region**



### Barwon South West Region

49 people participated in Phase 2 of the Engage Vic online survey and the top three vegetation management activities those people undertook to reduce bushfire fuels are mechanical activities (87%), controlling weeds (70%) and burning vegetation (52%).

In addition to Engage Victoria, Barwon South West region undertook a postal survey and used an independent researcher to gauge support or opposition to, the fuel management strategies. The postal survey received over 600 responses. 80% of postal survey responses indicated support or acceptance for a 'balanced' fuel management strategy.

The researcher also conducted several focus groups with communities around Portland and Hamilton to gauge their support for different possible fuel management strategies, with over 80% in support or accepting of a fuel management strategy that balanced outcomes across the 'things valued', such as protection for human life and protection for biodiversity values.

The region also held workshops with stakeholders from Landcare, local government, fire and land management agencies, Regional Roads Victoria, Vision Australia, Regional Development Victoria, Aboriginal Victoria and Birdlife Australia.

Online survey participants were asked to consider the level of support they believed they required from various agencies to manage bushfire fuels on private property. The results were as follows:

| Level of Responsibility | Myself | My community | Fire agencies | Local government |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Not at all responsible  | 0%     | 14%          | 27%           | 14%              |
| Mostly                  | 44%    | 23%          | 20%           | 20%              |
| Some what               | 4%     | 45%          | 48%           | 64%              |
| Solely                  | 51%    | 18%          | 5%            | 2%               |

The top three responses with regards to peoples preferred support to manage bushfire fuels on their property:

- No need for any advice or support (33%),
- self-service information (31%) and
- help to navigate regulations and permits (24%).

### Gippsland Region

268 people participated and favoured strategy 3 as the preferred option with a general acceptance rate of 84%. Strategy 3 provided the highest amount of fuel treatment, moderate broader landscape treatment and the highest amount of planned burning in short intervals around towns.

Respondents indicated the most important bushfire prevention actions were community education, forest and plantation patrolling, and arson prevention programs.

The respondents indicated the most important suppression actions were maintaining fire breaks and track access before a fire starts, fire detection, simplified rules and reduced bureaucracy to help manage vegetation on private land, and support to physically reduce fuel and ongoing free green waste removal.

### Grampians Region

66 people participated and ranked the most important factors that should influence planning were to reduce the risk of bushfire to people and home (1), reducing the risk of bushfire to the economy (2) and reducing the impact of bushfire on threatened flora and fauna (3).

The participants also described the top three activities they undertake to reduce bushfire fuels as mechanical activities (80%), controlling weeds (65%) and burning vegetation (56%). Email links were sent to known 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 Grampians region footprint and postcards encouraging people to complete the survey were circulated. The survey was promoted at local markets, neighbourhood houses, community events and community group meetings.

The level of responsibility that participants believed the following groups have in managing bushfire fuels on private property were as follows:

| Level of Responsibility | Myself | My community | Fire agencies | Local government |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Not at all responsible  | 3%     | 20%          | 25%           | 15%              |
| Mostly                  | 34%    | 39%          | 18%           | 19%              |
| Some what               | 7%     | 34%          | 54%           | 58%              |
| Solely                  | 56%    | 7%           | 3%            | 8%               |

### Hume Region

172 people participated. 90% of respondents saw the benefits of land and fire agencies to consider forests on private land in fuel management planning. 7% didn't see a benefit and 3% didn't respond. There were other opportunities to engage with the planning process including, commenting on plans and programs and consulting with the 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.

The level of responsibility that participants believed the following groups have in managing bushfire fuels on private property were as follows:

| Level of Responsibility | Myself | My community | Fire agencies | Local government |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Not at all responsible  | 0%     | 24%          | 22%           | 19%              |
| Mostly                  | 31%    | 28%          | 24%           | 26%              |
| Some what               | 6%     | 36%          | 47%           | 45%              |
| Solely                  | 60%    | 8%           | 2%            | 6%               |
| Didn't respond          | 3%     | 5%           | 5%            | 3%               |

86% of respondents perceived they were at a high (42%) or medium (44%) risk of bushfire impacting their property on typical summers day.

### Loddon Mallee Region

In Loddon Mallee, the planning process was informed by collaborative work done with the multi-agency Safer Together Working Group and their LGA clusters. 113 people participated and the top three activities those people undertook to reduce bushfire fuels were mechanical activities (79%), controlling weeds (71%) and burning vegetation (45%). During the engagement period, the region also held information stalls at farmers markets and ran two open houses primarily for environmental groups.

The level of responsibility that participants believed the following groups have in managing bushfire fuels on private property were as follows:

| Level of Responsibility | Myself | My Community | Fire agencies | Local government |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Not at all responsible  | 0%     | 25%          | 23%           | 10%              |
| Mostly                  | 41%    | 34%          | 24%           | 25%              |
| Some what               | 3%     | 33%          | 49%           | 58%              |
| Solely                  | 56%    | 8%           | 5%            | 7%               |

The top three areas of support that people needed to manage bushfire fuels on their property were; no need for any advice or support (35%), self-service information (28%) and help from CFA (25%).

### Metropolitan Region

542 people participated and the top three activities those people undertook to reduce bushfire fuels were mechanical activities (78%), controlling weeds (70%) and burning vegetation (55%). There were other engagement activities underway at several key points in the planning process and a community advisory group had been convened to provide more detailed input and feedback to the planning team.

The level of responsibility that participants believed the following groups have in managing bushfire fuels on private property were as follows:

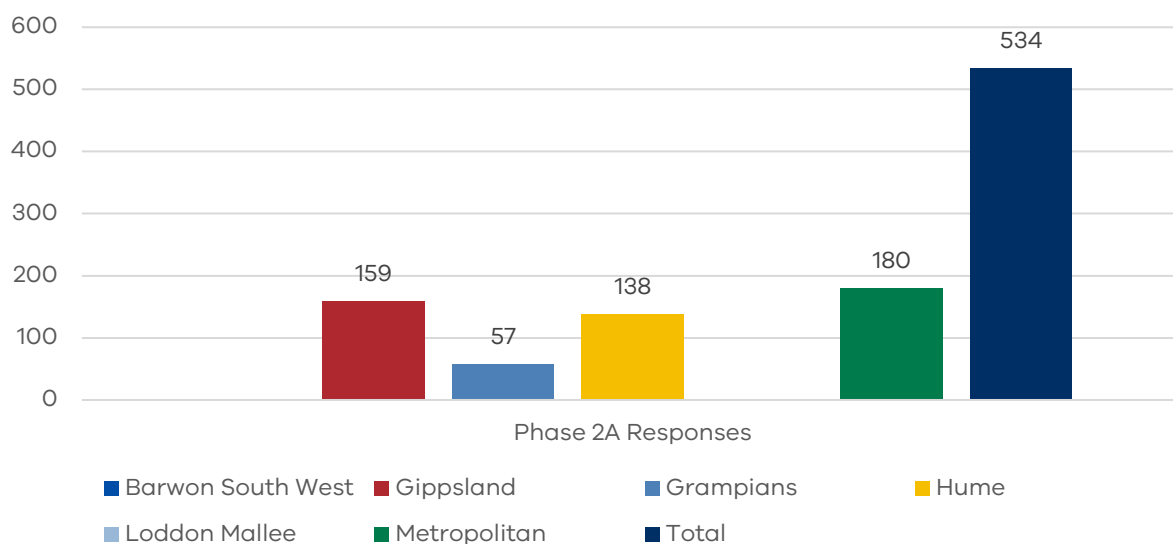
| Level of Responsibility | Myself | My Community | Fire agencies | Local government |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Not at all responsible  | 1%     | 25%          | 28%           | 26%              |
| Mostly                  | 43%    | 34%          | 19%           | 26%              |
| Some what               | 6%     | 34%          | 50%           | 49%              |
| Solely                  | 50%    | 10%          | 3%            | 5%               |

The top three areas of support that participants needed to manage bushfire fuels on their property were; self-service information (40%), no need for any advice or support (28%), and help from CFA (28%)

## Phase 2A and 2B

Phase 2A was the second opportunity for the community to comment on the fuel management strategies and presented the Priority Fuel Management Areas (PFMA) for the first time during the Engage Victoria process. The community were asked to rank three potential options for the PFMA as well as provide further comments on the fuel management strategies. Phase 2a was optional for the regions to participate in and it meant the only three DELWP regions out of a total of six participated in the process. The engagement was open from the 3 June to 24 June 2019. Grampians undertook a second round of consultation for Phase 2 known as Phase 2B, a summary this is included in this section.

**Figure 12: Total of Phase 2A and 2B responses by region**



Note: Phase 2A was optional and Barwon South West and Loddon Mallee Regions did not partake in this phase. Phase 2B for Grampians region responses are included in this graph.

### Gippsland Region

159 people participated. 68% (101) supported at least one of the PFMA options. 9% (15) chose a different PFMA for their local area than the whole of Gippsland. 32% (51) did not support any PFMA option. There have been other engagement activities at key points in the planning process and an expert reference group had been convened to review the planning process and provide more detailed input and feedback to the planning team.

| PFMAs strategy option     | Support for PFMA |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| 30% coverage of Gippsland | 40%              |
| 20% coverage of Gippsland | 27%              |
| 10% coverage of Gippsland | 33%              |

51% of respondents didn't support any PFMA option and 80% of these cited opposition to planned burning for their reasons.

Participants were also asked what emphasis should be placed on the measures of risk used to develop PFMAs, 45% selected the dwelling loss, 33% selected locality impacts and 22% selected economic loss.

### Grampians Region 2b

130 people participated. A similar proportion of responses either liked or could like Strategy 2 (64%) and Strategy 3 (66%). 46% participants identified strategy 3 as their preferred option.

| PFMAs strategy option  | Pref. 1 | Pref. 2 | Pref. 3 | Pref. 4 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Strategy 1 – Focus on burning around high-risk townships limited burning elsewhere   | 3%      | 12%     | 15%     | 48%     |
| Strategy 2 - increased burning around high-risk townships limited burning elsewhere  | 5%      | 22%     | 39%     | 12%     |
| Strategy 3 - increased burning reducing risks to roads, infrastructure, tourism and agriculture                                | 35%     | 20%     | 13%     | 11%     |
| Strategy 4 – increased burning around high-risk townships treatments away from towns focused on maintain a healthy environment | 36%     | 24%     | 11%     | 7%      |

The key themes that emerged from the responses were: biodiversity conservation and wildlife considerations, roadside vegetation management, cost considerations were used in people's decision to rank preferred methods and the Grampians name as region causes confusion.

### Hume Region

138 people participated. 78% (101) supported a moderate fuel management strategy. 9% (15) chose a different PFMA for their local area than the whole of Hume. 32% (51) did not support any PFMA option. To further help us understand community views and other stakeholders, a Strategic Bushfire Advisory Reference Group was formed, which includes apiarists, vignerons land managers and other members of the community. The region also garnered feedback from municipalities via their Municipal Fire Management Planning Committees.

| PFMAs Cover                                    | Liked the strategy | Can live with it | Didn't like the strategy |
|--|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Strategy A<br>(Low fuel management program)    | 31%                | 25%              | 41%                      |
| Strategy B<br>(Medium fuel management program) | 22%                | 52%              | 6%                       |
| Strategy C<br>(High fuel management program)   | 41%                | 17%              | 43%                      |

The top three areas that influenced the participants decision were; the performance of each strategy against the five key values (1), amount of fuel management in each strategy (2), and overall spread of fuel treatment across Hume region.

### Metropolitan Region

130 people participated. A similar proportion of responses either liked or could Strategy 2 (64%) and Strategy 3 (66%). 46% participants identified strategy 3 as their preferred option. This includes engagement of land and fire managers, local government staff, University of Melbourne representatives, a community advisory group, and public feedback from Phase 1 and Phase 2 engagement surveys.

| PFMAs Cover   | I like this strategy option | I can accept this strategy option |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Strategy 1 - top 3% of localities treated for private land risk                   | 15%                         | 26%                               |
| Strategy 2 - top 10% of localities treated for private land risk                  | 23%                         | 41%                               |
| Strategy 3 - top 30% of localities treated for private land risk                  | 44%                         | 24%                               |
| Strategy 4 - top area treated for private land risk in each local government area | 17%                         | 29%                               |

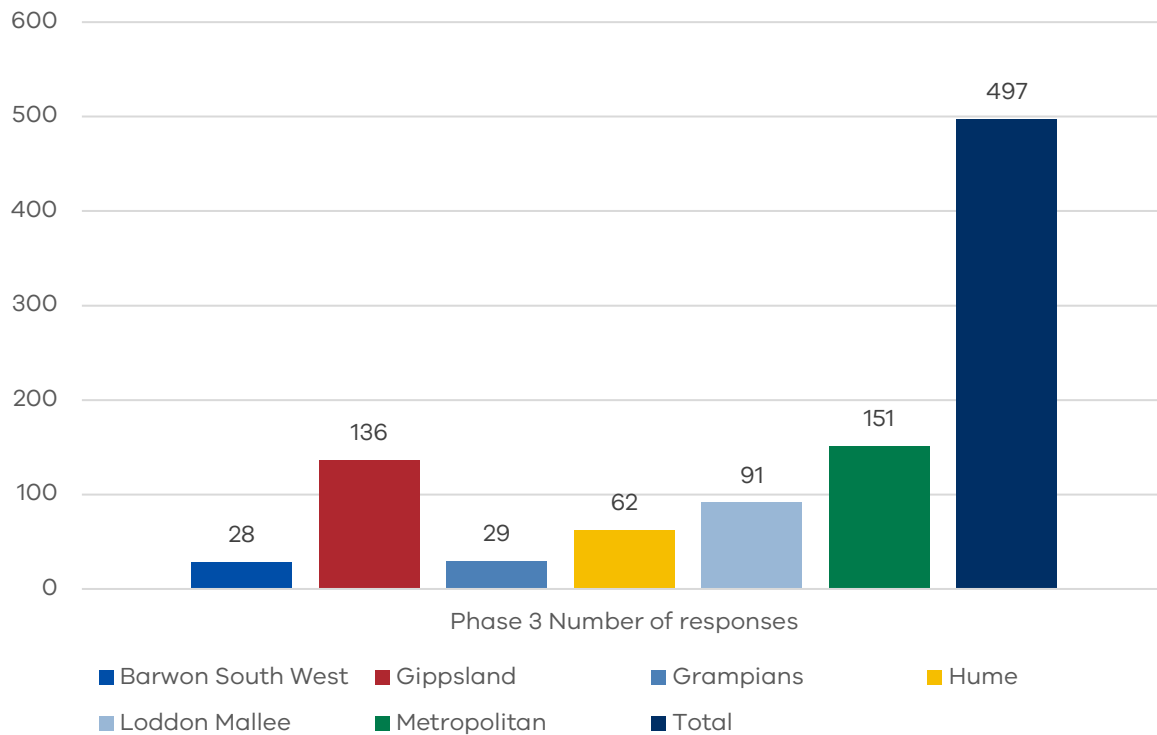
The top three areas that influenced the participants decision were; minimising loss of life and property (1), the area of the PFMA (2), and native biodiversity conservation.



### Phase 3

Phase 3 engagement focussed on the proposed final strategy for each region. The Engage Victoria portal was open from the 29 July to 19 August 2019.

**Figure 13: Total of Phase 3 responses by region**



### Barwon South West Region

#### Engagement activities and communication methods

The region garnered responses from 28 participants and received 600 responses from postal surveys as well as focus groups with communities around Portland and Hamilton. This was to gauge the participant support for a range of possible fuel management strategies. The region held workshops with stakeholders from Landcare, local government, fire and land management agencies, Regional Roads Victoria, Vision Australia, Regional Development Victoria, Aboriginal Victoria, Birdlife Australia, disaster relief agencies and farming industry peak bodies. Regular communications through newsletters and one-on-one conversations

#### Summary of the feedback

- More than 80% of responses supported the strategy option which balanced outcomes for multiple values such as protection of life and public assets.
- Rural landholders reported confusion and concern about regulatory constraints and their ability to undertake fuel management activities on private land.
- Many people raised concerns about fires starting in roadside vegetation and on evacuation. There is a desire for simplification of rules around roadside vegetation.
- Rural communities want their knowledge and experience in fire and land management to be understood and valued by fire and land management agencies.

#### Work undertaken based on the feedback

Community feedback during the early phases of consultation drove the planning team to develop and test new ways to measure the effects of different fuel management strategies on human health and well-being.

The results from surveys and consultations were used by the multi-agency planning team to refine fuel management strategy options to reduce bushfire risk.

Feedback from surveys about fuel management on private land will inform how fire agencies and land managers can better partner with communities to reduce bushfire risk.

There will be a series of small workshops with community and stakeholder representatives to develop a model which helps us understand the effects of roadside fuel management on risks to the things that the community values, such as life and property.

### Gippsland Region

#### Engagement activities and communication methods

The region received feedback from 136 participants via online consultation and from workshops with over 200 responses from key stakeholders, agencies, local government, water corporations and community organisations. 20+ workshops were run with subject matter experts, practitioners and agency staff.

#### Summary of feedback

- Community and fire management sector substantially agree about the objectives for bushfire management in Gippsland.
- Simpler rules to allow people to manage vegetation and provision of direct support from fire agencies would help individuals manage fuels on private land.
- It is important to manage bushfire risk to smaller and more remote communities as well as highly populated areas.
- Performance against objectives was a main driver in people selecting their preferred public land fuel management strategy.
- Opinions regarding Priority Fuel Management Areas varied, but people generally agree about what they should be designed to be in order to protect what people value.

#### Work undertaken based on the feedback

Throughout the consultation phases, feedback from participants influenced the development of the Bushfire Management Strategy. The region adopted values and objectives for bushfire management that the community and sector agreed upon in Phase One. The region discussed community responses to online consultation while developing options for public land fuel management and used them to help shape the range of options considered.

The region evaluated the options for public land fuel management against performance measures that reflected the objectives the region adopted following Phase One. The region selected the public land fuel management option with the highest level of acceptance from Phase Two participants.

The region determined the extent and location of Priority Fuel Management Areas using responses from Phase Two participants. The region drafted public land fire management zoning that was consistent with the community's preferred option for fuel management and incorporated local preferences received through Engage Victoria and other avenues.

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### Grampians Region

#### Engagement activities and communication methods

The region received feedback from 29 participants via online consultation. They also ran 10 placed based engagement events which captured the views and comments of community members. The region ran 12 workshops with subject matter experts, practitioners and agency staff.

#### Summary of feedback

- 90% were likely or extremely likely to manage fuels on their property. 82% expected others to reduce fuels.
- 71% chose a strategy with both increased burning around and treatments away from townships. Slightly more preferred the treatments away from townships to be focused on maintaining a healthy environment than on reducing risk to roads, infrastructure, tourism and agriculture.
- 70% indicated they required some help with managing bushfire fuels on their own property, with 33% of these selecting two or more support methods.
- 74% saw a benefit to land managers and fire agencies considering forested private land in their fuel management planning. Most felt that private landowners were solely or mostly responsible for managing fuels on private land, with fire agencies and local council seen as being somewhat responsible

#### Work undertaken based on the feedback

The feedback from surveys, community events and forums with stakeholders indicated very similar values and objectives. The objectives and priorities became the foundation for developing the four potential strategy options.

The work people were already doing on their properties to reduce fuel showed an acceptance of the shared responsibility towards bushfire risk. It showed agencies how communities wish to be supported and how agencies can work more closely together to plan fuel reduction across adjoining public and private land.

All information was considered in the SBMP committee decision-making, along with balancing bushfire risk, ecological needs and required resources based on scientific modelling, flora and fauna studies, agency experience and community feedback.

### Hume Region

#### Engagement activities and communication methods

Feedback for the region came from 62 participants in the online consultations. Monthly conversations occurred with the Strategic Bushfire Advisory Reference Group comprising of apiarists, vignerons, land managers and other members of the community. The region consulted with the Municipal Fire Management Planning Committees. They also ran 12 workshops with subject matter experts, practitioners and fire agency staff.

#### Summary of feedback

- 86% of total respondents perceived they had a high or medium risk of bushfire impacting their property on an average summer's day.
- 90% of survey respondents indicated that they would see a benefit in land managers and fire agencies including forested private land in fuel management planning.
- 44% of survey respondents have experienced bushfire in their area and 90% of respondents felt a strong sense of responsibility to manage fuel levels on their property.
- A moderate fuel management program (Strategy B) was the most preferred Priority Fuel Management Strategy, having the greatest overall support (74%) with the lowest disapproval rating (6%).

#### Work undertaken based on the feedback

Community feedback from the Phase One consultation determined five core values, which were used as performance measures to compare three potential Priority Fuel Management Area strategy options.

Strong feedback from Phase Two supported the incorporation of forested private land in the three potential Priority Fuel Management Areas.

The extent and location of the Priority Fuel Management Areas was determined by the public-preferred strategy from the Phase 2a consultation.

The zoning for fire management on public land was drafted to be consistent with the preferred strategy selected in the Phase 2a consultation.

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### Loddon Mallee Region

#### Engagement activities and communication methods

Feedback garnered from the region included 91 participants from the online consultation. There were two listening posts in Castlemaine and Kangaroo Flat, as well as a stall at the Mallee Machinery Field Days in Speed.

#### Work undertaken based on the feedback

Based on feedback from community and stakeholders, the following objectives were set to guide the strategy:

- Protection of human life
- Protection of critical infrastructure
- Protection of private property
- Protection of local economy
- Protection of community cohesion, function and well-being
- Protection of environmental values and resilience
- Protection of cultural heritage

#### Strategy A

Draft Strategy A was developed with fires starting under the worst possible weather scenario (Black Saturday conditions). Fuel management was to mainly occur within national parks and state forests around townships and identified priority assets. In areas with high risk reduction potential fuel reduction activities (burning, slashing or mulching) will be intense and frequent.

#### Strategy B

This draft strategy option has been developed with tailored weather scenarios for each local council area in mind. While bushfires at Black Saturday weather conditions will always be most destructive, these events are very rare. Fires under less ferocious conditions might be much more frequent, but still destructive as well. This strategy also considers the likelihood of a bushfire starting at each weather scenario. In addition to focussing on townships and priority assets, this strategy considers access and egress to these areas as well. Ecological values are more prominently reflected in this strategy.

#### Strategy C

This draft strategy option builds on draft strategy option B but considers fuel management outside national parks and state forests in addition. Where possible, and only with landowner's consent, fuel management will be targeted at areas that have the highest risk reduction potential, regardless of land tenure. This strategy also takes access and egress to and from bushfire prone areas into account.

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Of the three strategies, the overwhelming preference was for Strategy C. This feedback, along with the ranking of objectives and other comments along the way has described what we should focus on for the new strategy. This includes:

- reducing the risk from bushfires to human life and property,
  - more fuel management happening on private land and private landholders having a part in this,
  - protecting important infrastructure and looking after local economies, and
  - minimising any negative impacts fuel management activities may have on the environment.
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### Metropolitan Region

#### Engagement activities and communication methods

Feedback was received from 151 participants in the online consultations. Regular conversations with the Bushfire Strategy Advisory Group, comprising of community members, agency and local government representatives. Five workshops with subject matter experts, practitioners and operational agency staff also took place.

#### Summary of feedback

- Online respondents preferred PFMA in the top 30% of localities where vegetation management would reduce bushfire risk. The main reason was that it had the greatest potential to reduce loss of human life and some felt that any option with a lower potential should be disregarded.
- 14% of respondents commented on the responsibility of agencies for bushfire management on public and council-managed land, and that agency priority should be given to managing vegetation to reduce risk to communities.
- Members of the Bushfire Strategy Advisory Group preferred including the top 15% of localities. The main reason was it helped prioritise efforts while balancing the practicalities of implementation and impact to the environment. Some people noted that doubling the area treated would only lead to a 5% increase in benefit between the 15% and 30% options.
- Personal responsibility and the desire to be autonomous in decisions about fuel management on private land were strong themes. These people want more freedom to undertake actions on their land and want stronger rules to require individuals and government to undertake those actions on private or public land.

#### Work undertaken based on the feedback

The feedback received helped shape the objectives and provided insight into how the community expects agencies to deliver these objectives, by considering research, science, and what communities value, coupled with strong community engagement and education.

Responses reiterated what agencies and council already understand about bushfire management discussions - that they are complex, wide ranging, and that there is more we can do to improve both the information we provide, and the way we provide it.

The final option selected for PFMA in the strategy was the 30% option. In considering the final strategy consultation the region took in the feedback from the community as well as feedback from agencies. They considered the importance of the community feedback that was supporting a stronger life and property strategy.



## Observations

Some of the key observations to assist in future engagement are:

### Positive observations

- Where there was a resource in place to promote the Engage Victoria process it was more effective than without a resource in place.
- The use of the “MyCFA” and other agency community networks was important in generating responses.
- The consultation process provided the opportunity for innovative solutions to be incorporated into the engagement – e.g. Gippsland social pinpoint map.
- The significant number of responses and the quality and detailed nature of the feedback provided good evidence base for future engagement.
- The use of the online survey gave greater opportunity to other types of communities to have access to provide input into the process.
- The process was resource intensive, but capability across the planning teams has now developed as a result - to deliver engagement of this nature. Through continuous improvement, future engagement can be delivered more efficiently and effectively.

### Neutral observations

- It is important for the Engage Victoria platform to be utilised in a balanced way to complement other engagement activities and is not the sole answer to engagement and public consultation.
- There is potential to work more closely with Engage Victoria developers, with the future aim of providing more effective online engagement that is fit for purpose. Department and emergency management sector are becoming super users through many forms of engagement delivered on this platform.

### Areas for improvement

- There is potential for interest groups, stakeholders and members of the community to be highly engaged and actively encourage others to participate. This can lead to strong representation in certain specific areas and be appropriately acknowledged in analysis of public feedback.
- Greater focus for future online engagement consultations would benefit from a holistic engagement approach – for example letter boxing a postal survey and providing a link to the same online survey to boost effectiveness.
- It proved challenging for the state team to coordinate each region at different stages of development in the planning process.
- It is important to provide consistency to ensure that everyone is provided with the same opportunity to input into the planning process and strategies across all regions (for Statewide stakeholders, or communities straddling intersecting regions).

- Due to the tight deadlines of planning process, the consultations periods were quite short, particularly for Phase 2A (two weeks in total). Ideally the minimum recommended consultation length is four weeks, to maximise reach and participation.
- It is critical to ensure that a clear communication strategy is developed and coordinated across regional partner agencies, that is well resourced and executed. This will maximise the effectiveness, reach and the quality and value of input through online engagement.