

Phase One Engagement Summary

Background

Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world. Bushfire risk is increasing as our population grows and climate change results in more frequent, more severe weather conditions. Bushfire in Gippsland poses a real threat to lives, homes, the economy, our lifestyles and the environment. Managing bushfire risk is an ongoing and shared responsibility – a partnership in which everyone has a role.

Strategic bushfire management planning brings together land and fire managers, stakeholders and communities to develop a common understanding of bushfire risk across the landscape and determine appropriate management strategies and actions to reduce that risk. The Gippsland Strategic Bushfire Management Planning (SBMP) team¹ is developing strategic bushfire management plans for both public and private land across Gippsland. These plans will form the bushfire component of the Gippsland Regional Strategic Fire Management Plan, and will inform more detailed operational level planning, including municipal fire prevention planning, joint fuel management planning, and readiness and response planning into the future. This will enable us to target our actions more effectively and efficiently to reduce risk, while maintaining and enhancing the things that Gippsland communities value.

Over the past six months, the planning team has held a number of workshops with land and management agencies² across Gippsland to identify fundamental values and objectives that will guide fire planning in Gippsland and to develop an agreed approach to strategic bushfire management planning. Community input is also an important consideration in the development and update of bushfire management strategies, and this community consultation will help guide bushfire risk reduction on both public and private land across Gippsland into the future.

The Gippsland SBMP team is conducting a series of three public consultations across Gippsland to elicit relevant community opinion and local knowledge that can guide the development of strategic bushfire management strategies. These consultations will:

1. Identify community values and objectives for bushfire management (September 2018).
2. Provide opinion on a number of alternative fuel management strategies (January - February 2019).
3. Provide feedback on the selected strategy to inform future versions (April 2019).

¹ The Gippsland SBMP team has representatives from DELWP Forest and Fire Planning, Parks Victoria, the Country Fire Authority and Gippsland Local Government.

² Agencies involved in the Sector workshops were the Country Fire Authority, Emergency Management Victoria, East and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authorities, Gippsland and East Gippsland Water, Southern Rural Water and Melbourne Water, Latrobe City, Baw Baw, Bass Coast, South Gippsland, East Gippsland and Wellington Shire Councils, Parks Victoria, VicForests, DELWP Fire Districts, Natural Environment Programs and Forest Fire Management.

This report is a preliminary summary of participants' responses from the first of these consultations. It provides an overview of the backgrounds of respondents, and an overview of respondents' sentiment on the values and objectives for the SBMP process in Gippsland. A more detailed report on stage 1 will be provided prior to stage 2, featuring analysis of the full range of information provided by participants.

Engagement Process

Survey rationale

The Gippsland SBMP team developed an online survey to elicit community opinion on a number of matters relevant to the Gippsland Strategic Bushfire Management Plan. The survey included quantitative and qualitative questions to obtain data on:

- Community rating of the values and objectives identified by the sector, and opinions on whether other values and objectives should be included
- Community opinion and ideas for improvements to the way agencies manage bushfire risk on public land
- Community opinion and ideas about what agencies and community can do on private land to reduce the risk from bushfire
- Any trends in opinion that might be related to the experiences and backgrounds of survey respondents, such as locality of residence, previous bushfire experience, primary source of income, and recreational activities related to the natural environment.

Promotion of the engagement opportunity

The survey was promoted using multiple channels, in an attempt to reach a broad range of Gippslanders. This included:

- Emails to all available stakeholder and special interest group mailing lists (including industry, recreational and environmental)
- Emails and flyers to all partner agencies for distribution to staff
- Emails and flyers to Country Fire Authority (CFA) districts for distribution to groups and brigades
- Emails and flyers to all local government areas (LGAs) for distribution via community newsletters and hubs
- Flyers at the offices and community hubs of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), and Parks Victoria
- Articles in all major local papers prompted by a media release
- Posts scheduled at regular intervals on DELWP social media
- Radio interviews
- Word-of-mouth and flyers at place-based community events.

Access to the survey

The survey was open for access at engage.vic.gov.au between 3 September and 1 October 2018. Hardcopy survey forms and stamped return envelopes were also provided for people who had difficulty accessing the web-based form.

Initial Summary of Results: Backgrounds and Experiences of Respondents

Public participation

In total, 300 survey responses were received. Of these, 294 completed the online survey, while six respondents took advantage of the hardcopy option. Gippsland recorded the highest number of survey responses of any region in Victoria and achieved seven times the state-wide per capita response rate.

Respondents’ location of residence or property ownership

The majority of respondents (270) live in Gippsland, with the remainder either owning property in Gippsland but residing elsewhere (14), or neither living in, nor owning property in, Gippsland (12). The municipality with the greatest number of respondents was East Gippsland (132), which may have been associated with increased messaging regarding the early onset of the Fire Danger Period in this area during the open consultation. Table 1 shows the number of respondents by municipality. While providing specific locality information was optional for participants, the townships and settlements with more than 5 respondents were: Bairnsdale, Bruthen, Loch Sport, Mallacoota, Inverloch, Lakes Entrance, Cabbage Tree Creek, Warragul and Forge Creek/Wattle Point.

Table 1: Number of respondents by municipality

Local Government Area of interest	Number	%
East Gippsland	132	43
Wellington	50	17
Bass Coast	37	12
Baw Baw	32	10
Latrobe City	20	7
South Gippsland	13	4
Neither own property nor live in Gippsland	12	4
Prefer not to say	4	1
TOTAL	300	100

Respondents’ duration of residence in their local area

Some communities in Gippsland are undergoing long-term demographic change (e.g. sea- or tree-change), which may affect residents’ understanding and opinions regarding fire management. Asking how long people have lived in their locality gives us a sense of how well they know their area and how likely their opinions are to be informed by knowledge or past experience of bushfire in that area. Most respondents have lived in their area for more than 10 years, with only 9% having lived in their areas for less than 2 years. LGAs with the highest percentage of ‘newer’ residents are Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires. Over 60% of respondents from East Gippsland and Wellington Shires have lived in their localities for more than 10 years and more than 44% of East Gippslanders have lived in their area for more than 20 years.

Table 2: Respondents’ time living in locality

Time living in locality	Number	%
0 - 1 year	14	5
1 - 2 years	13	5
2 - 5 years	33	11
5 - 10 years	45	15
10 - 20 years	70	24
More than 20 years	120	41
TOTAL	295	100

Past experience of bushfire and perceived personal risk from bushfire

Participants were asked a number of questions to determine how they perceived their risk from bushfire; whether they felt they needed personal bushfire plans; and what experience they had in relation to bushfire response or recovery.

- 55% of the respondents (162) who completed the quantitative questions rated their personal bushfire risk as low to medium, while the remaining 45% (135) rated their risk from bushfire between high and extreme.
- 14% of respondents (42) had been directly affected by bushfire and another 56% (161) had been threatened but not affected.
- 36% (108) of participants had at some stage responded to fire in a voluntary capacity and 24% (70) are current CFA or SES volunteers. 25% (75) of participants had responded to fire in a professional capacity at some stage.

- 24% (70) of respondents had been involved in fire recovery efforts in a volunteer capacity at some stage and 16% (48) had been involved in fire recovery efforts in a professional capacity.
- 84% (250) respondents said they needed a bushfire plan but only 191 (76.4%) of those have plans that are up to date.

Sources of income

The major sources of income/employment for survey respondents were Government Agency, Private Business, Retirement Pension/Superannuation and Agriculture, Horticulture or Dairy. Latrobe City and Baw Baw Shires had the highest rates of Government Agency employees; Wellington and East Gippsland had the highest rates of people employed in the Agriculture, Horticulture and Dairy sectors; South Gippsland had the highest rates of Private Business participants.

Table 3: Respondents' main sources of income

Main source of income	Number	%	Highest %	Lowest %
Government agency	69	23	Latrobe City / Wellington	East Gippsland
Private business (other)	53	18	South Gippsland	Baw Baw
Retired/Pension	42	14	East Gippsland	South Gippsland
Agriculture, horticulture, dairy	22	7	Baw Baw	Latrobe City
Education	16	5	Latrobe City / Wellington	East Gippsland
Healthcare	15	5	Wellington	Baw Baw / Latrobe City
Non-government organisation	14	5	South Gippsland	Baw Baw
All other sources of income	69	23		
TOTAL	300	100		

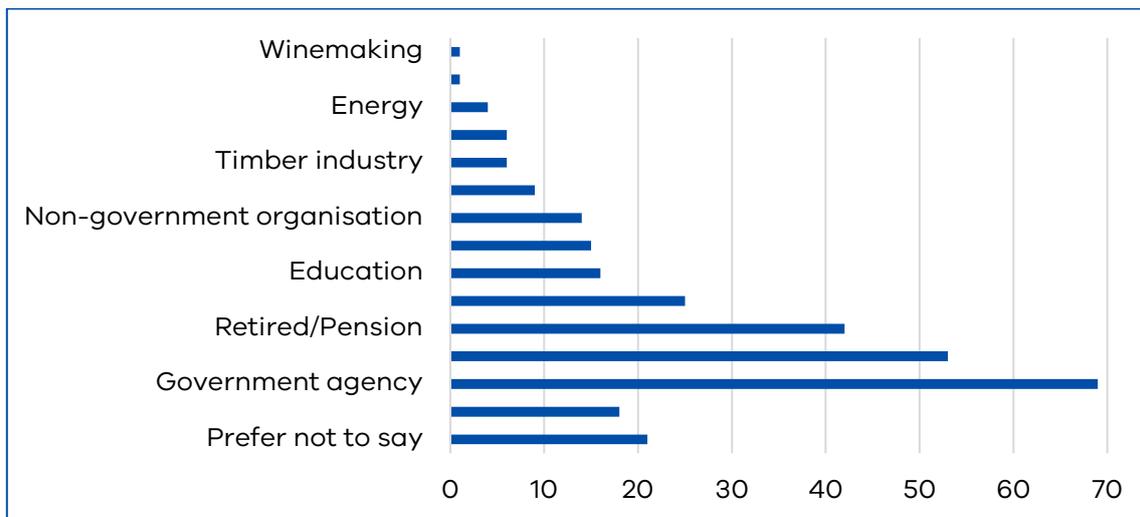


Figure 1: Main sources of income by number of respondents

Recreational and other activities

Respondents were asked whether they participated in a range of activities that could be affected by bushfire management activities, especially fuel reduction and planned burning. Many respondents participated in multiple activities, and the most common activities were bushwalking, camping and day trips. Almost a quarter of respondents are CFA or State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers. Two other activities mentioned by multiple respondents were horse-riding and fishing; these were not featured in the original question because it seemed likely that most participation in these activities in Gippsland would be less directly affected by fire management activities such as planned burning.

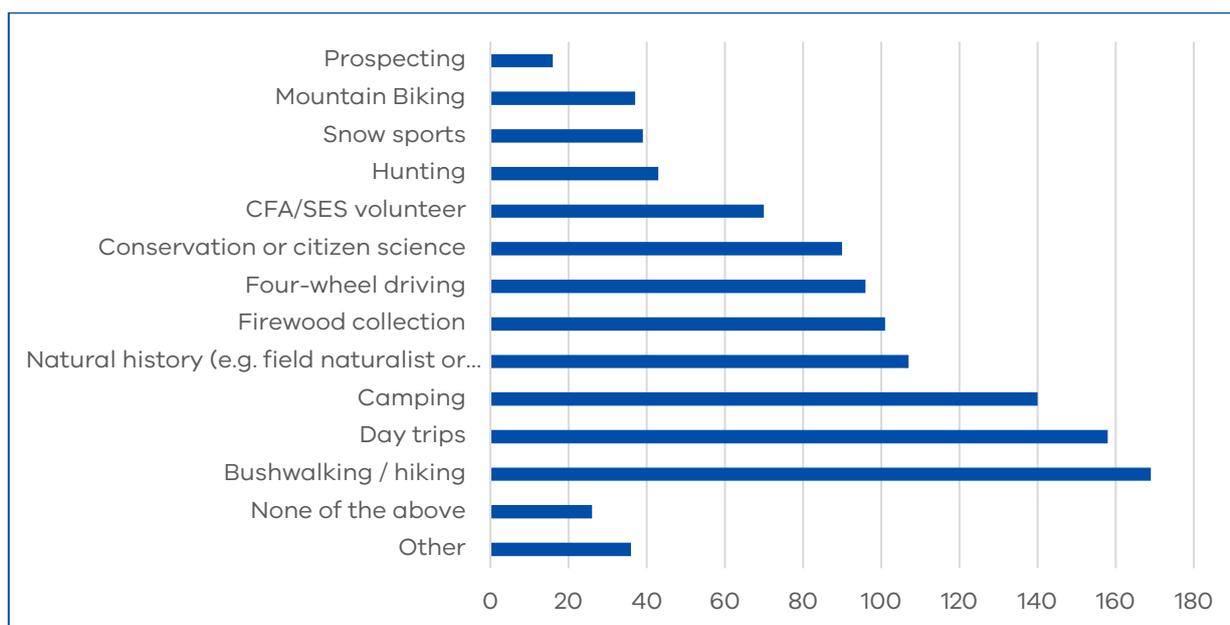


Figure 2: Number of respondents participating in activities related to fire management

Engagement Outcomes

Fundamental Values and Objectives

Participants were asked to rank the importance of the fundamental values and objectives identified by Gippsland’s land and fire management agencies and suggest any others that should be included.

Table 4: Gippsland SBMP fundamental values and objectives

Values	Objectives
Human life	Minimise human life loss and serious injury
Wellbeing: individual, social, cultural	Minimise social, livelihood and economic disruption
Nature: biodiversity and ecosystem function	Minimise disruption to essential services and critical infrastructure
	Minimise loss of community and cultural assets
	Minimise decline in native plant and animal populations

There was substantial agreement between the sector and the community, in terms of the comparative importance of values and objectives, on average. Specifically, both sector workshops and community respondents to this survey ranked human life as the most important fundamental value, followed by nature, followed by wellbeing (Figure 3). Although Wellbeing had the lowest importance rating of the three values, its average rating of 8 stars (out of 10) shows that all values were deemed highly important by most survey respondents.

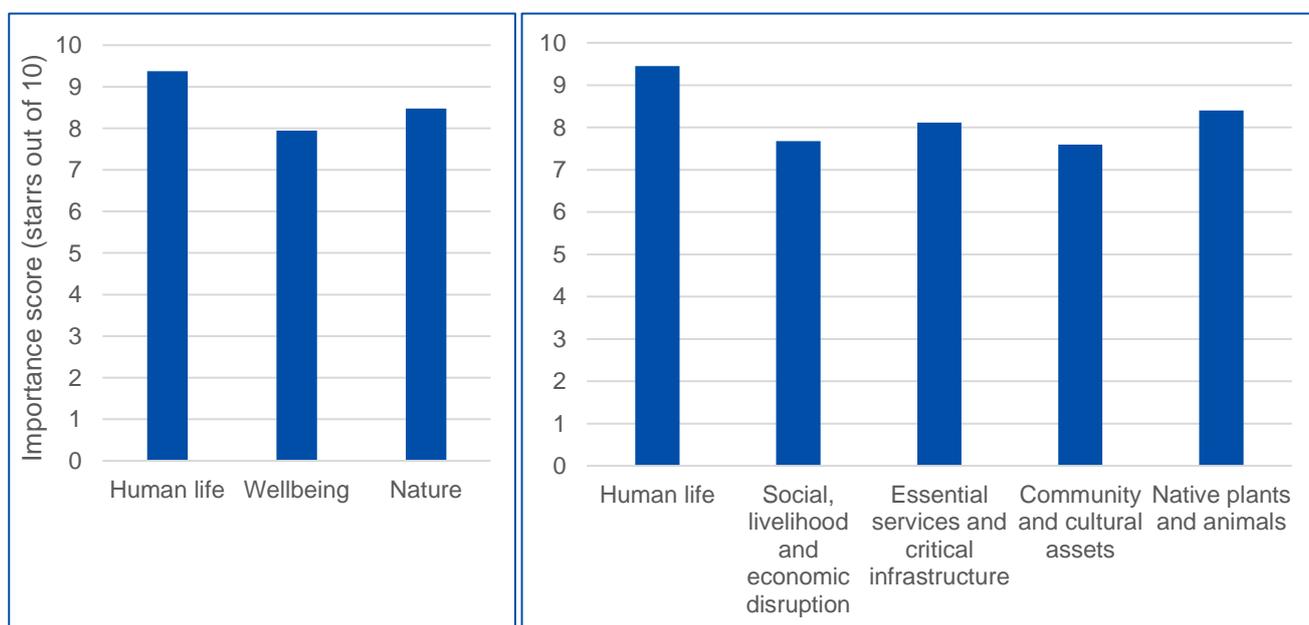


Figure 3: Average importance score allocated by respondents to the Gippsland fundamental values (left) and objectives (right)

Among objectives, minimising human life loss and serious injury was deemed the most important objective (on average across respondents), followed by minimising declines in plants and animals. The other objectives, which are mostly related to wellbeing, were ranked from third to fifth in importance (Figure 3). Again, the lowest ranked objective – minimising loss of community and cultural assets – had an average rating of 7.5 stars (out of 10): this clearly indicates that respondents overall placed a high degree of importance on the Gippsland SBMP objectives.

Participants provided a broad range of responses to the two qualitative (open-ended) questions about what was important to them (related to fire management), beyond the listed values and objectives. However, initial analysis of these responses identified relatively low levels of agreement between participants about *which* specific values or objectives were missing. For example, although 11 respondents mentioned either animals or livestock in response to these two questions, these people had a variety of perspectives (ranging from animal welfare through to commercial value of stock), and represented only 4% of participants. In other words, 96% of participants did *not* nominate animals or livestock as a missing value or objective. Other categories with multiple responses included economics (7 respondents) and climate changes (5), but again these were from a variety of perspectives and were shared by only a small fraction of participants (2%).

Next Steps

Analysing responses to qualitative questions

Most participants supplied detailed answers to the qualitative questions in the survey:

- What else is important to you that is not captured in the values and objectives?
- What could government agencies do to improve bushfire management on public land?
- What could private individuals do to help improve bushfire management on private land?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

This has produced a rich source of information to help the SBMP team better understand the community perspectives on fire management in Gippsland. Planning team members have read these responses and are in the process of categorising them into approximately 50 opinion categories for further analysis. It was not possible to complete a comprehensive assessment of qualitative responses before the due date for this report, so this will be included in a final report on the phase 1 survey, before phase 2 commences.

Final phase 1 report

This report will be completed before the phase 2 survey opens in January 2019. It will be distributed to survey participants who registered their email addresses, to relevant fire- and land-management agency personnel in Gippsland and will be available on the phase 2 Engage Victoria website.

Further steps in the Gippsland SBMP process

Between now and June 2019, the SBMP planning team will continue the process of developing, analysing and selecting fuel management strategies for Gippsland. The results from the phase 1 Engage Victoria survey will be shared with participants in strategy development workshops, so that government agency participants are aware of community opinion on the fundamental values and objectives.

Phase 2 of the Engage Victoria public engagement process will provide community members with the chance to provide feedback on alternative fuel management strategies. This phase will be open for comment between mid-January and mid-February. Once the final strategy for Gippsland has been selected, a third phase of consultation via Engage Victoria will be open in late May, offering an opportunity for the community to review the overall outcome of the SBMP process.

Appendix 1: Survey

Please complete the survey to have your say on strategic bushfire management objectives for the Gippsland region.

1. Thinking about bushfire management, how important are the following values to you?

10 stars means maximum importance, and 1 star means the value is of no importance to you.

Values are important and lasting beliefs or ideals about what is good or bad, and desirable or undesirable. There is no right or wrong answer, just your personal beliefs.

1a. Human life Required



1b. Wellbeing: individual, cultural, social Required



1c. Nature: biodiversity and ecosystem function Required



2. Are there any values that are highly important to you that aren't listed above?

You have 500 characters left.

3. Thinking about bushfire management, how important are the following objectives?

10 stars means maximum importance and 1 star means the objective is of least importance

Objectives are the goals we want to achieve with fire management to support the fundamental values of the Gippsland community. There is no right or wrong answer, just your own personal beliefs.

3a. Minimise loss of human life and serious injury Required



3b. Minimise social, livelihood and economic disruption Required



3c. Minimise disruption to essential services and critical infrastructure



3d. Minimise loss of community and cultural assets Required



3e. Minimise decline in native plant and animal populations Required



4. Are there any objectives that are highly important to you that aren't listed above?

You have 500 characters left.

5. What could government agencies (e.g. local councils, CFA, DELWP, Parks Victoria) do to improve bushfire management on public and private land?

You have 1,000 characters left.

6. What could private individuals do to help improve bushfire management on private land?

You have 1,000 characters left.

7. Do you think you need a personal bushfire plan? Required

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

8. Is your bushfire plan up to date? Required

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

9. Have you had personal experience of bushfire? Required

- I have been personally affected by bushfire (personal loss or displacement)
- I have been threatened by bushfire (but did not suffer personal loss)
- My family and/or friends have been affected or threatened by bushfire
- None of the above

10. Have you assisted with bushfire response or recovery? Required

- I have been part of an emergency response to bushfire as a volunteer
- I have been part of an emergency response to bushfire as a paid professional
- I have assisted with community recovery from bushfire as a volunteer
- I have assisted with community recovery from bushfire as a paid professional
- I have directly supported others who have been affected by or responded to bushfire
- None of the above

11. Do you think that land and fire agencies should focus their actions on: Required

- Minimising the number of dwellings lost to bushfire. This involves focusing efforts on a smaller number of high-risk locations.
- Minimising the number of locations at which dwellings are lost to bushfire. This involves spreading efforts across more locations but providing reduced protection to high-risk locations.

12. Are you a Gippsland resident or land owner? Required

- I am a Gippsland resident
- I own property in Gippsland but do not currently reside in Gippsland
- I don't live or own property in Gippsland

13. Which local government area (shire) in Gippsland do you live in? Required

- Bass Coast
- Baw Baw
- East Gippsland
- Latrobe City
- South Gippsland
- Wellington
- I don't live in Gippsland
- Prefer not to say

14. What town or locality do you live in? (optional)

You have 75 characters left.

15. How long have you lived in this town or locality?

- 0 - 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- 10 - 20 years
- More than 20 years

16. How would you classify your personal risk from bushfire? Required

- Low
- Medium
- High
- Very High
- Extreme

17. What is your main source of income?

- Agriculture, horticulture, dairy
- Apiary
- Education
- Government agency
- Healthcare
- Energy
- Non-government organisation
- Private business (other)
- Timber industry
- Tourism
- Unemployed
- Winemaking
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

18. What activities do you regularly participate in? Required

(select as many as apply)

- Bushwalking / hiking
- Camping
- Conservation or citizen science
- CFA/SES volunteer
- Day trips
- Firewood collection
- Four-wheel driving
- Hunting
- Mountain Biking
- Natural history (e.g. field naturalist or birdwatching)
- Prospecting
- Snow sports
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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