

Strategic Fuel Breaks

Barwon South West Region

Vegetation Removal and Biodiversity Management *Version 1.1*

What is a Strategic Fuel Break?

Strategic Fuel Breaks (SFBs) are a strip of land where vegetation has been permanently modified to reduce the rate of spread and intensity of fire for the direct protection of assets and/or assist fire control.

They involve the permanent reduction of bushy vegetation through mulching and slashing, and the removal of trees, stumps, logs and branches. They can be corridors of land up to 40 metres wide. That are maintained as a fuel reduced area.

Why is the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning (DELWP) removing native vegetation for Strategic Fuel Breaks?

SFBs are an important bushfire management measure for DELWP and other emergency services. They are a change to the landscape to reduce bushfire risk for local communities.

Measures like SFBs are a key action in our regional response to more frequent, intense and damaging bushfires in the context of a changing climate. Establishing these breaks also responds to *Recommendation 6* of the Inspector General for Emergency Management's independent inquiry into the 2019-2020 Victorian fire season, that the department '.... plan for and increase the application of non-burning fuel management treatments including mechanical means'.

What considerations have DELWP made?

The impacts on biodiversity are considered through both the planning and construction of SFBs.

As part of the planning process, environmental assessments are undertaken. This ensures any impacts on animals or important native vegetation are managed.

We have obligations under State and Commonwealth regulations to avoid impacts to the environment

wherever possible. We must also undertake activities to minimise the impact where they are unavoidable.

Some of the regulations we need to meet are:

Planning and Environment Act 1987

Under this Act, a planning permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation under Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 unless an exemption applies.

In the Barwon South West (BSW), DELWP will be accessing the Fire Protection and Crown Land exemptions (refer to box on page 2 for details), DELWP will:

- design the SFBs to ensure that the “avoid and minimise” principles are built into all stages of the project. We need to demonstrate that works are only removing the smallest amount of native vegetation possible to establish the SFBs.
- secure approvals from the Secretary of DELWP. We do this through an approved plan.
- counterbalance any loss of biodiversity from construction of the SFBs. This means we need to improve native vegetation and biodiversity elsewhere on Crown land. Counterbalancing works could include weed and pest management, revegetation or the rehabilitation of degraded sites.
- DELWP will annually record and report on all counterbalancing activities.

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act) is the key piece of Victorian legislation for the conservation of threatened species and communities and for managing potentially threatening processes. It places importance on prevention to ensure that more species are not threatened in the future.

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What do Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 of the Victoria Planning Provisions say?

A planning permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation under Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 unless an exemption applies. For the SFB program, two exemptions apply.

Where native vegetation that is to be removed, destroyed or lopped to the minimum extent necessary:

Fire Protection:

“... to carry out... making a strategic fuel break up to 40 metres wide by, or on behalf of, a public authority in accordance with a strategic fuel break plan approved by the Secretary to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning” (as constituted under Part 2 of the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987).

Crown Land:

“to manage Crown land by or on behalf of the Secretary to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning” (as constituted under Part 2 of the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987), “or Parks Victoria, and in accordance with the Procedure for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation on Crown land”.

The environmental checks we complete for each SFB may identify biodiversity that needs consideration under this legislation.

- The FFG Act makes public authorities and ministers consider potential biodiversity impacts when carrying out works (set out in the new section 4B). This shows the Victorian Government’s commitment to embed biodiversity considerations in decision making. The potential impacts on biodiversity to be considered include:
 - long and short term impacts
 - harmful and beneficial impacts
 - direct and indirect impacts
 - cumulative impacts
 - potentially threatening processes.

In addition, DELWP will complete the following tasks to meet the requirements of the FFG Act

- Undertake checks on all proposed and maintained SFBs to consider the impacts, threats and the reduction of harmful effects to species listed under the FFG Act.
- Complete a biodiversity analysis to proactively avoid, manage or reduce harmful impacts to the environment.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

SFB areas containing *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) protected species or ecological communities are assessed to determine the need for referral to the Commonwealth Environment Minister for assessment and approval.

We assess each SFB by:

- Identifying areas where a Matter of National Environmental Significance (MNES) might occur
- Avoiding an EPBC MNES where practicable.
- Consideration under the FFG or EPBC Acts does not mean an area of vegetation cannot be managed to reduce fuel loads.

Will DELWP undertake Monitoring and Evaluation of the SFBs?

Yes, we are working with research partners to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework. This will inform the planning and delivery of SFBs and as a result the mechanical works. It will also include an ongoing maintenance program of mulching and weeding.

More information:

For more information on these topics please contact the DELWP Customer Information Centre on 136 186 (ask for the Barwon South West Strategic Fuel Break Project team), or email StrategicFuelBreaks.BarwonSouthWest@delwp.vic.gov.au

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More information weblinks:

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988:
[Victoria's Framework for Conserving Threatened Species \(environment.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/conservation/ffg)

Native Vegetation removal regulations:
[Native vegetation \(environment.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/conservation/nv)

The guidelines for more information on these approvals or exemptions are provided in the following document:

[Procedure for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation on Crown land \(PDF, 1.3 MB\)](#)

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
[Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 \(EPBC Act\) Home Page | Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Australian Government](#)

Strategic Fuel Breaks Program:
[Strategic Fuel Breaks Program \(ffm.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au)

Barwon South West Bushfire Management Strategy:
[Barwon South West \(safertogether.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.safertogether.vic.gov.au)

Vegetation Management for bushfire protection fact sheet:
[Vegetation management for bushfire protection \(planning.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.planning.vic.gov.au)

CASE STUDY - Wrinkled Buttons (*Leiocarpa Gatesii*)



During 2020 – 2021 in Lorne in the Surf Coast Shire, new records of an EPBC listed species, Wrinkled Buttons (*Leiocarpa Gatesii*) were found during the ecological survey.

This survey was undertaken before construction of the SFBs. This discovery was reported to the SFB team and recorded in the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA).

As a result of the identification of these records, DELWP applied a buffer area around the known populations where treatment and management of the SFB differed to the standard construction. We will monitor the effectiveness of these protections to help inform future management methods.