

Phase One Engagement Summary

Background

The Metropolitan region strategic bushfire management planning process has been informed by land fire managers, local government, Melbourne University and a community advisory group.

We have built on the extensive knowledge and experience that exist within bushfire management agencies and communities. Our engagement activities are testing what we know and seeking new ideas from a range of stakeholders to understand how we can all work together to improve bushfire management on private and public land.

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

Engagement Process

This is one of three planned opportunities for the community to provide online feedback using the Engage Victoria website on elements of the Metropolitan Strategic Bushfire Management Plan process.

There are other engagement activities underway at several key points in the planning process and a community advisory group has been convened to provide more detailed input and feedback to the planning team.

Engagement Approach

A short survey was developed to collect feedback from the community about the draft objectives for the Metropolitan Strategic Bushfire Management Plan.

The Engage Victoria website is a way to give the widest possible opportunity for the community to have input into the planning process. Members of the public were given four weeks to complete the survey. Appendix 1 contains the full survey questions as shown on the Engage Victoria website.

Promotion

The Engage Victoria survey was promoted on social media of partner agencies involved in the planning process such as DELWP, CFA, PV, and local government. An email link was 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 Metropolitan region footprint.

Participants

Two hundred and twelve surveys were completed for the Metropolitan region. One hundred ninety-eight surveys were completed by people who live in the area.

Nearly forty percent of surveys were completed by people who had previous experience of bushfire in the area.

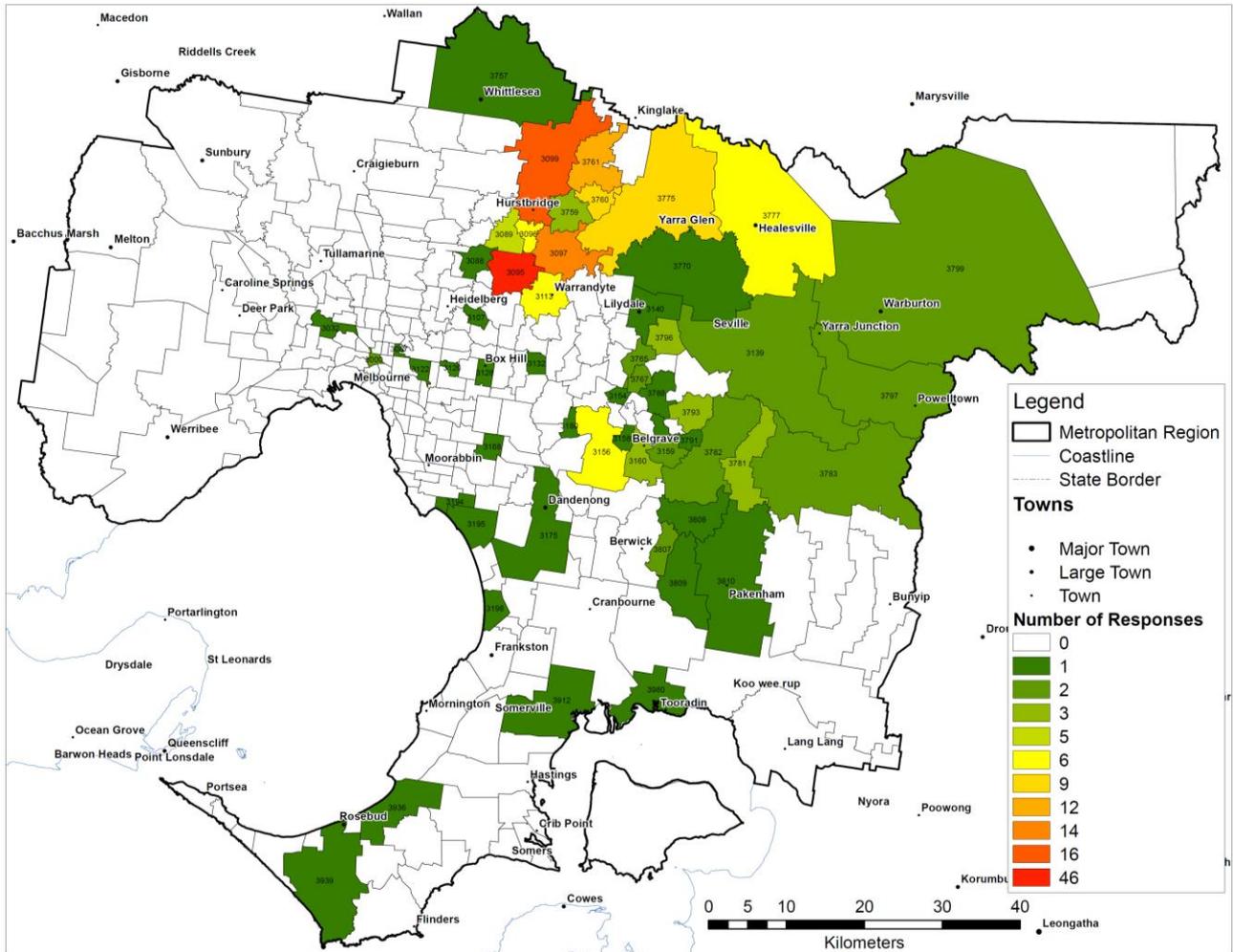
Metropolitan Region Bushfire Management Planning

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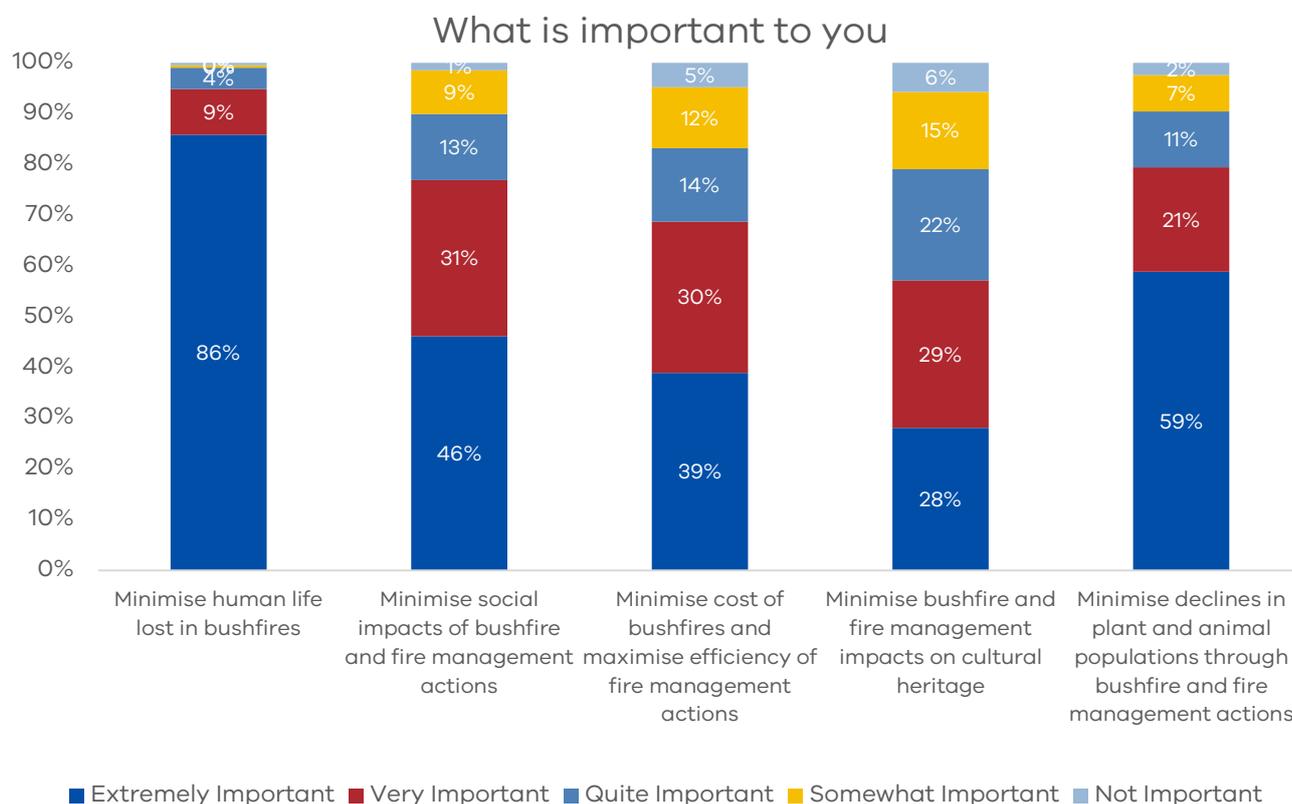


The map below shows the distribution of respondents by postcode. Out of the two hundred and twelve responses, there were one hundred and ninety responses that provided postcode information, with forty-six of those responses from postcode 3095 which includes the suburbs of Eltham, Eltham North and Research.

Figure 1: Metropolitan Bushfire Management Planning – Phase 1 Engagement Responses by postcode.



The following graph shows how respondents ranked the draft objectives from 'Extremely Important' to 'Not Important'.



Minimising human life lost is considered the most important objective by respondents, followed by minimising the decline of plant and animal populations. The way these results reflected the values of respondents was explored further in the free text responses summarised below.

Free Text Responses

The responses received in this section highlighted the passion and broad range of views in bushfire management across the Metropolitan region.

Below is an overview of the key themes that emerged from the responses.

All efforts have been made to faithfully represent the overarching views of all the respondents across all three free-text questions. However, not all responses fell within the scope of the questions asked or answered multiple questions in one response.

Thinking about bushfire management, what could government agencies (e.g. local government, CFA, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria) do to improve bushfire management on public and private land?

A recurring theme in responses to this question was the importance of agencies and local government working together in bushfire management. Agencies and local government working together with communities was also important to respondents.

What you said:

Agencies should encourage and support private land owners and residents to undertake bushfire mitigation activities.

There was a perception among respondents that there is currently too much red tape associated with preparing their properties. Preparations are also seen as expensive. Respondents felt that people may be more likely to act if government provided incentives for people to manage risk. Some also thought there should be tougher penalties for those that take no mitigation action in high bushfire risk areas. Some residents living next to government-managed land wanted the opportunity to undertake mitigation activities across their boundary.

Maintain bushfire readiness and response

Responses highlighted the need for government to maintain infrastructure such as roads and fuel breaks. It was also stated that agencies should be appropriately resourced to respond when a bushfire does occur and to also carry out preventative measures (such as arson prevention programs). Accurate and timely bushfire warnings and advice messages were seen as crucial for residents to take appropriate action in an emergency.

Educate and inform

Educating and providing information about levels of bushfire risk, and how to prepare based on that level of risk, was mentioned often. Many respondents would like to see higher levels of bushfire risk education by government and believe it should happen through multiple media.

Campaigns that help people to understand and appreciate the reality of what it is like to be in a bushfire were suggested. Those that had experienced bushfire talked about how it had changed the way they now prepare.

Some respondents would also like to see more information provided about the impacts of bushfire management activities, for example, the impacts of planned burning smoke on health, and how environmental impacts are considered in risk reduction activities.

Long-term evidence-based planning that considers local values

Across the spectrum of views concerning the best way to minimise bushfire risk, most considered the use of up-to-date science and applying best practice as being crucial to the strategic planning process. The ability to monitor and review the strategic bushfire management plan, and for this planning to include long term outcomes were also seen as important.

Consideration of community assets and values informing the planning process was important to many, and the importance of these factors on community and individual identity and recovery was recognised.

Consider bushfire management in context

A strong theme was that bushfire management doesn't exist within a vacuum. Many responses discussed bushfire management activities being impacted by factors such as population growth, urban development, building standards, climate change and the economic and political environment.

Limiting building development and population growth in high bushfire risk areas was a recurring suggestion for the government.

The environment, in particular, was discussed as being negatively impacted by multiple factors, with bushfire management being an additional, potentially significant, disturbance. The importance of environmental monitoring and evaluation was mentioned by some respondents.

Thinking about bushfire management, what could private individuals do to help improve bushfire management on public and/or private land?

In considering actions by members of the public, many respondents emphasised the importance of personal responsibility and taking personal action. Nearly half of the respondents had experienced bushfire.

Another key point made by many was that they were ready and willing to (or were already) undertaking bushfire management on their land but needed more guidance and support from government and agencies.

What you said:

Actively seek to understand your risk

There was strong feeling among respondents that land owners have a responsibility to find out what their bushfire risk is and understand the consequences.

Take action

Most respondents suggested multiple ways residents should prepare themselves and their properties for a bushfire, with many also suggesting that leaving early was part of their own plans.

Having a bushfire plan that is practised, and perhaps developed with the assistance of agencies such as CFA, was mentioned multiple times.

Work with agencies and local government

Following the advice and instructions of agencies and government, and complying with regulations and overlays, were seen as important - although as discussed in the previous section, some respondents also felt very strongly that existing rules about managing bushfire risk on private land is currently too restrictive.

Some respondents suggested that residents should be involved in bushfire management planning with their local government and agencies.

Behaviour on public land

Respondents identified that bushfire risks are sometimes created by individuals on public land such as smoking in parks on high fire danger days, deliberately lighting fires, and dumping rubbish and green waste on roadsides and fuel breaks that can become bushfire fuel.

Get involved with your local community

Respondents suggested that people could become more educated and engaged about bushfire management activities on their land and in their community if they volunteered with the local CFA brigade, or a community group.

Other recurring themes included attending community meetings, getting to know (and checking in on) neighbours and vulnerable people and participating in local bushfire planning activities.

Vegetation management and environmental impact

In the survey one of the most polarising elements discussed regarding bushfire mitigation across public and private land was vegetation management and environmental impact. Responses ranged from some respondents being strongly in favour of significantly increasing planned burning, increased vegetation removal and relaxing laws relating to private land clearing, to some respondents strongly advocating for the elimination of all planned burning as a bushfire mitigation strategy.

Most respondents recognised the need for balance between reducing immediate bushfire risk to communities and reducing the impact on the environment.

Next Steps

The results of this survey will be used by the planning team in developing strategy options to reduce bushfire risk. A more detailed explanation of the results, and where they have been included in the planning process, will appear in the final engagement report for this project in mid-2019.

The next stage of engagement will give members of the public the opportunity to provide feedback on the bushfire management strategies currently being developed. This stage will open on the Engage Victoria website in January 2019.

The Metropolitan Strategic Bushfire Management Planning and Engagement teams would like to thank all respondents for sharing their time, experience and expertise in responding to this survey.

More information

Online: <https://www.safertogether.vic.gov.au/understanding-risk>

Email: forestfire.planningpp@delwp.vic.gov.au

Appendix 1: Survey

Postcode
Please enter your postcode below

What is your interest in bushfire management in Metropolitan region? (Tick all that apply)

- I live in the area
- 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'm a community volunteer in the area (e.g. Field naturalists, 'Friends of' group)
- I visit the area frequently
- I visit the area frequently for recreation (e.g. Bushwalking, trail riding, camping)
- I have past experience of bushfire in the area
- Other (please specify)

Thinking about bushfire management, how important are the following objectives to you?

	Extremely important	Very important	Quite important	Somewhat important	Not important	Unsure
Minimise human life lost in bushfires	<input type="radio"/>					
Minimise social impacts of bushfire and fire management actions	<input type="radio"/>					
Minimise cost of bushfires and maximise efficiency of fire management actions	<input type="radio"/>					
Minimise bushfire and fire management impacts on cultural heritage	<input type="radio"/>					
Minimise declines in plant and animal populations through bushfire and fire management actions	<input type="radio"/>					

Thinking about the objectives above that are most important to you, please explain why these are important.

Thinking about bushfire management, what could government agencies (e.g. local government, CFA, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria) do to improve bushfire management on public and private land?

You have 1,000 characters left.

Thinking about bushfire management, what could private individuals do to help improve bushfire management on public and/or private land?

You have 1,000 characters left.

How would you like to be involved in future stages of the planning process? (Tick all that apply)

- Sign up to the Metropolitan Region newsletter (provide email below)
- Receive updates on engagement opportunities for this planning process through Engage Victoria
- Hear about more opportunities to engage in my area (enter email below)

To hear about other opportunities to engage, please enter your email address

Is there anything else you would like to add?

You have 1,000 characters left.

How did you hear about this survey?

E.g. social media post, through an interest group, newspaper, etc

You have 255 characters left.

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