

# Frequently asked questions about the Yellingbo Conservation Area Bushfire Risk Management Plan



## 1. Why has the Yellingbo Conservation Area Bushfire Risk Management Plan been prepared?

The landscape surrounding and containing the Yellingbo Conservation Area (Conservation Area) has an existing high level of bushfire risk, and local communities have raised concerns that bushfire risk has the potential to increase as a result of revegetating some areas of public land as part of implementing the Conservation Area.

In response to these concerns, the Minister for Energy, Environment, and Climate Change committed to prioritising the development of a bushfire risk management plan, which incorporates community knowledge and informs a risk-based approach to revegetation and reserve planning that will not increase bushfire risk to the local and broader communities.

## 2. What area does the YCA Bushfire Risk Management Plan cover?

The YCA Bushfire Risk Management Plan applies only to public land within the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area is made up of approximately 3000 hectares of existing public land reserves and Crown (public) water frontages within an area extending from Healesville in the north to Millgrove and Hoddles Creek in the east, Emerald and Cockatoo in the south, and the southern Dandenong Ranges in the south-west.

## 3. How independent is the YCA Bushfire Risk Management Plan?

DELWP engaged Dr Kevin Tolhurst AM (Hon. University of Melbourne, Tolhurst Bushfire Services) and Justin Leonard (CSIRO) as independent experts in the field of bushfire risk, to examine risk at both a landscape scale and at a local level. Dr Tolhurst and Mr Leonard provided independent advice and expertise in measuring the risk associated with the establishment of the Conservation Area and in developing mitigation measures that can be incorporated into the design of the Conservation Area.

## 4. How much revegetation is proposed?

Within the Conservation Area, the large blocks of public land are largely already vegetated. A detailed revegetation plan will be prepared to implement targeted revegetation of some rivers and streams, likely to be around 300 – 400 hectares in total (around 10 per cent of the total Conservation Area).

## 5. Will the revegetation pose a greater fire risk?

Independent expertise and modelling has shown that the revegetation will not materially increase bushfire risk across the landscape. Some local scale mitigation measures have been included in the plan to ensure this at a local scale. An independent bushfire risk assessment is available in a report by Dr Kevin Tolhurst at [engage.vic.gov.au/yellingboconservationarea](http://engage.vic.gov.au/yellingboconservationarea). The proposed revegetation is along riparian (streamside) areas. Riparian areas tend to have a

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limited influence on bushfire spread in the landscape (DELWP, 2018). This is largely because:

- Fire will spread more quickly in cured grass or crops compared with forest.
- Trees generally reduce wind speed, and the rate of spread and intensity of fire; and
- Riparian land occupies a relatively small proportion of the broader landscape.

Fire is also much less likely to start in riparian land than other parts of the landscape, this is because it is typically not as prone to lightning strikes, is remote and therefore not easy for arsonists to access, has fuel too moist to burn and is sheltered from the wind and sun.

Contrary to popular belief, riparian areas do not generally act as a 'wick' or 'fuse'. Fires will generally only burn in the direction of the wind (while spreading more slowly sideways) or up-slope if burning under light wind conditions (CFA, 2016).

## 6. What are the objectives of the YCA Bushfire Risk Management Plan?

- Ensure there is no material increase in bushfire risk as a result of revegetating public land to implement the Victorian Government response to the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Yellingbo Investigation Final Report* (March 2014).
- Maintain or improve the resilience of natural ecosystems and their ability to deliver ecosystem services such as biodiversity, water, carbon storage and forest products.

Two key principles of the plan are:

- Human life will be afforded priority over all other considerations.
- Establishment of the Conservation Area will not materially increase the bushfire risk to the local or broader community.

## 7. What actions are proposed to help meet the Plan's objectives?

A series of actions are proposed to ensure that there is no material increase to bushfire risk in the broader community:

- Limit the extent of revegetation on public land near dwellings - minimum setback distance of 100 metres.
- Modify species selection to lower bark hazard species and vegetation buffers to better manage and moderate ember load potential.

- Restrict revegetation on public land to 10 metres from either side of the waterway in the restricted revegetation area only.
- Allow grazing under a riparian management license where appropriate.
- Improve access tracks and water points in consultation with local government and CFA brigades.
- Inform local residents on maintenance of properties.

## 8. Who will be responsible for implementing these actions?

Whichever agency is responsible for managing the land where revegetation is undertaken will be responsible for implementing these actions. The responsible agency could vary depending on current management arrangements, whether it be Melbourne Water, DELWP, or Council. The Conservation Area will ultimately be handed over to Parks Victoria for management.

## 9. Are there instances where vegetation can be planted within 100 metre setback?

Revegetation can occur within the 100 metre setback distance with the adjoining landholder's consent. Additionally, planting vegetation might be considered within the setback, in the context of land management works such as:

- Erosion management: such as planting vegetation to stabilise an eroding bank.
- Weed management: where weeds are treated, they must be replaced with another plant, or a different weed tends to replace it, making weed management futile.

## 10. Can grazing be used as a tool for fuel management?

While the Victorian Government response to the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Yellingbo Investigation Final Report* (March 2014) will result in the phase out of grazing licences on riparian Crown land in the Conservation Area, there is an opportunity for landholders to apply for a riparian management licence. There may be some circumstances where grazing can be used as a management tool. Use of grazing in this way will help to limit the accumulation of long pasture grass in areas that are not available for revegetation. Stock will not be permitted to graze in already vegetated areas of the Crown frontages.

Riparian management licences and licence conditions will be agreed on a case-by-case basis according to DELWP's *Managing grazing on riparian land: Decision*

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support tool and guidelines (2016), and the document *Licensing Principles for Fencing and Grazing within the Yellingbo Conservation Area*, which has been included in the Yellingbo Conservation Area Draft 10 Year Plan. Grazing under a management license is a practical management outcome from changes in land management and is not a conventional fuel treatment option for public land.

## 11. Will the 100 metre setback compromise the environmental objectives of the VEAC report?

Analysis indicates that out of the total Yellingbo Conservation area, less than two per cent of the total area will be impacted by the 100 metre rule. This is due to there being only a limited number of dwellings located in close proximity (less than 100 metres) from areas proposed for revegetation.

## 11. Does the Yellingbo Conservation Area Bushfire Risk Management Plan apply to Haining Farm?

The plan does not apply to Haining Farm. Haining Farm has its own bushfire mitigation measures, which are detailed on: [engage.vic.gov.au/haining-farm](http://engage.vic.gov.au/haining-farm)

*The Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee (YCACC) has many resources and information about the YCA – including many more FAQs. Visit: [ycacc.com.au](http://ycacc.com.au)*

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