

20. FIRE MANAGEMENT

20.01 Introduction

The Region is recognised as being among one of the most fire prone areas in the world. In many parts of the Region, and in particular the Dandenong Ranges, there is a conflict between the need to minimise wildfire risk and the desire of people to live in a bushland environment. In such areas, fire prevention work, including vegetation removal, must be balanced with the need to protect the character of the area.

Major statutory responsibility for wildfire prevention and suppression rests with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Country Fire Authority. Melbourne Water is also involved in fire prevention and suppression on land under its control.

There are well established procedures for cooperation and coordination of wildfire prevention and suppression within the Region, involving Councils, police, and other emergency services and the Regional and Local Advisory Committees established under the Country Fire Authority Act.

Research following the disastrous fires of Ash Wednesday (in February 1982), demonstrated that further attention needs to be paid to the way that buildings are sited and constructed, and to the need for management for fire protection purposes, particularly around the home. At the same time, there is a need to more adequately refine the ways by which the risk of wildfire is identified.

20.02 Primary Purpose

The primary purpose for the **fire management policies** is to support the prevention and suppression of wildfire and the provision of effective fire prevention measures, whilst at the same time ensuring that detrimental effects of fire prevention works on the Region's environment, on water yields and water quality from the Region's catchments, are minimised. They are also intended to assist in informing the Region's residents and visitors of fire hazards, and the implications of these hazards for life, property, landscape and environmental maintenance.

20.03 Regional policies - wildfire prevention and suppression

Wildfire prevention and suppression must be coordinated, and Public Authorities, Councils and planning authorities must have regard to:

- the need to protect life, property and other resources from wildfires;
- the need for residents and visitors to be made aware of the threat of wildfire;
- proposals for use or development in fire prone areas;
- the potential for detrimental environmental change which can be caused by fire prevention and fire protection works; and
- the preservation of native flora and fauna, wildlife habitats, water quality and water yield, and scenic landscapes.

Wildfire prevention and suppression must continue to be provided through existing agencies and coordination systems.

20.04 Fire protection management

All fire protection works undertaken or authorised by Municipal and Regional Fire Prevention Committees and by Government Departments and Public Authorities must be in accordance with Fire Protection Plans prepared by these bodies.

Matters to be addressed in the Fire Protection Plans include:

- the objectives for fire prevention and suppression;
- areas within the Region which are most prone to serious wildfire;
- strategic and tactical firebreaks, and buffer zones adjacent to those concentrations of population which would be threatened by wildfire;
- fire access roads and maintenance of fire access tracks;
- water supply points;
- areas where frequent fuel reduction will be required, including areas where environmental and/or landscape features require restraint in fire prevention works; and
- identification of bodies responsible for management of wildfire suppression and control activities.

Fire prevention agencies must take special care in planning and carrying out fire prevention works relating to:

- land within the Mt. Dandenong Main Ridge area;
- land within the Puffing Billy Railway Scenic Corridor;
- land within a Sites of Natural Significance or within, or in the immediate environs of, a Site of Cultural Significance;
- landscapes 'classified' or 'recorded' by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria);
- matters which may affect the maintenance of water quality and water yield from the Region's catchment; and
- roadsides throughout the Region.

20.05 Fire fuel reduction methods

The effects on natural eco-systems of "fuel reduction cool-burning" (particularly high frequency burning) and of "fuel reduction slashing" must be investigated by those responsible for fire management and prevention, in consultation with appropriate agencies and organisations.

Where it is shown to detrimentally affect the Region's native vegetation, fauna, wildlife habitats or water quality and water yield, the frequency and extent of burning and/or slashing must be re-assessed.

20.06 Land required for fire management

The Dandenong Ranges are a complex mosaic of natural areas and residential precincts. They are recognised as one of the most fire hazardous areas of the world. Various areas in the Dandenong Ranges support vegetation communities that are very inflammable and many are valued for natural characteristics. Residents live within and around these areas, and the environment that attracted them to the area can be placed at risk by their activities. At the same time, the people themselves can be threatened by that environment.

It is recognised and noted that people making the decision to live and work in this fire prone environment, whereby the intensity of fire may be high during the event of a bushfire, do so at their own risk. Fire safety of residents living within the Dandenong Ranges is primarily the responsibility of the individual to decide.

In times of bushfire it must be realised by the community that the fire services cannot make a commitment to protect all life and property within the area. To cope with this situation, the Government has carried out a land purchase program for many years with the objective of protecting environmental resources and reducing the fire hazard.

20.07 Land purchase for fire management

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources must identify those lots the Government intends to purchase. These lots will be reserved in the local sections of planning schemes as Proposed Public Open Space to ensure that owners have appropriate protection of their interests.

The Government may purchase other land from time to time on the open market when it becomes available at the discretion of the owners.