

Barwon Otway Bushfire Risk Landscape: Outcomes of the Otways Pilot of risk-based strategic bushfire management planning

Information Sheet 1, August 2013

Background

A pilot project to test a new risk-based approach to strategic bushfire management planning ran in the Otways from 2008 to 2012.

The pilot considered the efficiency and effectiveness of a more holistic, landscape approach to bushfire management based on long term strategic outcomes (such as minimising the impact of major bushfires on communities and enhancing ecosystem resilience), rather than short term actions or activities (such as track maintenance and the kilometres of track maintained).

Barwon Otway Bushfire Risk Landscape

Bushfire planning has traditionally occurred according to 'fire districts' – areas of land defined by administrative boundaries.

The Otways Pilot tested strategic bushfire management planning according to a 'bushfire risk landscape' – an area determined by where a severe bushfire could spread and do damage in the Otways landscape in a single day.

Legacy of the Otways Pilot

An external evaluation of the pilot was completed in October 2012 by *RM Consulting Group*. It identified strengths, weaknesses and key lessons from the pilot, and concluded that the approach was both effective and logical. It also determined that the approach represented a significant improvement in the actions, activities and approach to bushfire management.

In fact, the Otways Pilot demonstrated so much potential for improving bushfire management it informed the review of the *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land (2012)*. The code of practice review commits the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) to adopting a strategic risk-based approach to bushfire management state-wide.

The Barwon Otway bushfire risk landscape team is now one of seven teams established across the state to lead strategic bushfire management planning.

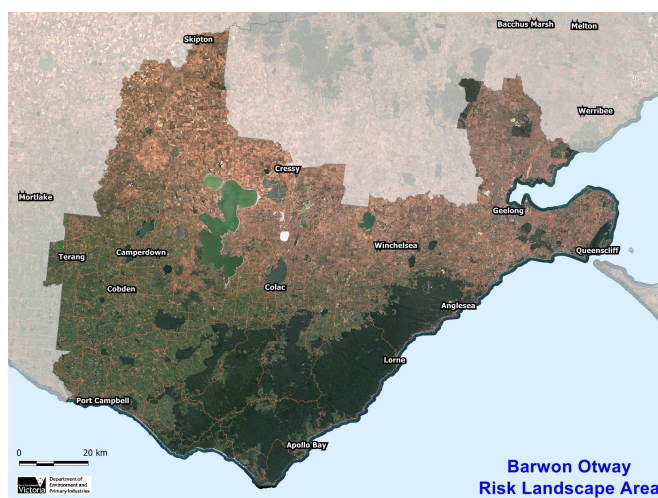
Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

A key element of the Otways Pilot was to develop a risk-based strategic bushfire management plan for managing bushfires in the Barwon Otway bushfire risk landscape.

A draft plan was developed by the project team and circulated for internal discussion and review by key stakeholders including local government, the Barwon South West Integrated Fire Management Planning Forum and the CFA.

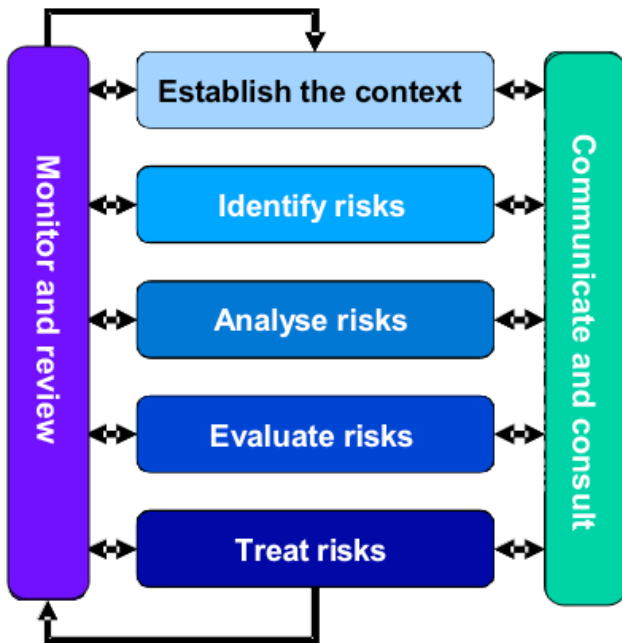
Drawing on the pilot lessons and the draft plan, DEPI is currently developing planning guidance to provide state-wide consistency and standards for how strategic bushfire management plans will be developed, what they will contain and how this information will be presented.

A Strategic Bushfire Management Plan for the Barwon Otway bushfire risk landscape, based on the content in the draft plan developed through the pilot, will be developed over the next 12 months in consultation with Otway communities and stakeholders. Completion of the plan is expected in mid-2014.



Map: Barwon Otway Bushfire Risk Landscape area.

Barwon Otway Bushfire Risk Landscape



The ISO 31000 standard approach to risk management is being applied to strategic bushfire management planning.

Risk-based Planning

A risk-based approach to bushfire management planning is guided by the principles of the internationally recognised ISO 31000 standard approach to risk management, shown in the diagram above. This approach was applied throughout the Otways Pilot in three main steps:

- establish the risk context
- risk assessment (identify, analyse & evaluate risks)
- risk treatment

The risk-based approach will be central to strategic bushfire management planning in risk landscapes, and will guide the development and selection of fire management strategies into the future.

Community and Stakeholder Consultation

The Otways Pilot involved extensive consultation with Otway communities and stakeholders. Ten workshops were held to understand community values and priorities so these could be reflected in the strategic bushfire management plan.

A stakeholder reference group provided important guidance on the development of the draft plan and broader pilot.

Contributions from the community workshops and the stakeholder reference group will be a core part of the final Barwon Otway Strategic Bushfire Management Plan when it is released in 2014.

Key components of a strategic risk-based approach to bushfire management are that community and stakeholder values are reflected in planning, and that communities are actively involved in the development of the plan. This is a high priority for Barwon Otway Bushfire Risk Landscape, with community engagement focussed on principles of inclusiveness, participation and transparency in decision-making.

Next Steps

The principles of the Otways Pilot are now being adopted into DEPI's ongoing strategic bushfire management planning across Victoria.

Locally, recommendations from the pilot evaluation are being incorporated into a new project from July 2013 - the Barwon Otway Bushfire Risk Landscape 'Strategic Risk Assessment & Strategy Selection' Project. This project will inform the development of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan.

The project will identify strategies to manage bushfire risk and the most effective combinations of those strategies in the Otways, in conjunction with stakeholder input and community representation.

DEPI is working with The University of Melbourne's Centre for Excellence in Biosecurity Risk Analysis to develop a consistent and transparent decision making process for this project to consider the impacts and outcomes of various bushfire management strategies.

A Stakeholder Advisory Group, to be convened during 2013, will facilitate considerable stakeholder and community input throughout the decision making process.

More Information

For any further information on the Otways Pilot, or on strategic bushfire management planning in the Barwon Otways, please contact Peter Galvin, Strategic Partnerships Facilitator, on 5233 5537 or at peter.galvin@depi.vic.gov.au

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