

# Independent investigation into the Lancefield-Cobaw fire: Recommendations

November 2015

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has accepted all 22 of the recommendations from the independent investigation into the Lancefield-Cobaw fire. Below is an overview of the recommendations.

## Community engagement

DELWP should ensure that stakeholders beyond the immediate burn area are prioritised, communication is delivered in an active and meaningful way that suits the needs of the community, and community perspectives that reflect the diverse land uses are incorporated into the planned burning program.

## Structure

The report recommends a review of DELWP's structure at all levels to better integrate operational burn planning and operational implementation and to provide sound governance, risk management and quality control.

## Branding

DELWP should consider better branding the portfolio dealing with fire management and planned burning on public land so there is an enduring entity to build stronger and more sustainable relationships with the community.

## Systems and processes

DELWP should focus on improvements to systems and processes, such as: improving the way risk is assessed to be reflective of the broader landscape; ensuring resourcing is appropriate to risk; contingency planning is in place; and adopting a tenure blind approach.

The required weather information should be made available to staff undertaking a planned burn. A review of current weather training should be done and new technology incorporated.

A quality assurance and peer review system be put into place to ensure lessons are learnt and any areas of concern are addressed.

Greater consideration should be given to using aircraft for burn security surveillance as well as assisting in delivery of the planned burning program and fire suppression activities.

DELWP should broaden its focus and consider planned burning as just one of the many options in managing fuels. It should engage with Emergency Management Victoria in seeking and implementing solutions to improving landscape scale bushfire risk management.

## Risk

DELWP should undertake a thorough review of its risk management and approvals processes. Risk assessments and outputs should be clear, current and useful and not just rely on operational knowledge. Risk assessments should include triggers to reassess risk when conditions change. Continuity of staff managing planned burns should be implemented where possible and staff knowledge and experience commensurate to the level of risk posed by a burn.

The report notes the current approach to audits of hazardous trees and suggests this audit and assessment process be expanded to other aspects of burn planning, preparation and implementation.

## Recommendations

1. The Department must adopt a tenure-blind approach to the management of bushfire risk including the planning of burns
2. In broadening its focus the Department should consider planned burning as just one of many options in managing fuels, landscape risk, multiple tenures, diverse land uses and must incorporate community perspectives
3. The Department should engage with EMV in seeking and implementing solutions to improving landscape scale bushfire risk management
4. The Department should undertake a thorough review of the risk management and approvals processes
5. The risk assessment processes and its outputs should be clear and comprehensible, able to be understood, reviewed and challenged by operational practitioners, and senior managers without fire backgrounds, as well as technical burn planners
6. Context setting and contingency planning should be specifically included within the reformed risk management processes
7. Clear rules and triggers should be established to ensure that burn plans are reviewed whenever the risk profile changes due to circumstances such as significant changes to boundaries, abnormal seasonal conditions, adjoining development or land use changes
8. A burn scheduled for ignition must have a current and useful risk assessment
9. The approach to audits of hazardous tree assessments and associated works should be extended to other aspects of burn planning, preparation and implementation
10. A review of the organisation's structures and processes at state, regional and district levels should be undertaken to better integrate operational burn planning and operational implementation and to provide sound governance, risk management and quality control
11. Burn OICs with appropriate knowledge and experience commensurate with the nature and complexity of the fuels and planned burn operations should be actively involved from the beginning of the planning process
12. To the maximum extent possible given numbers and availability of suitable staff across partner agencies, there should be a single Burn OIC to provide operational continuity across days of ignition and burn management
13. An audit and quality assurance function should be established to maintain standards, facilitate continual improvement and to manage risk at all levels of the organisation
14. Planning for resources must include any works necessary for the preparation of burns prior to the main ignition
15. Indicative resourcing of burns must take account of the risk assessment and also provide for operational contingency planning
16. Burn OICs must be fully involved in determining appropriate levels of resourcing for different operational phases and shifts
17. Greater attention to drought factors and their interactions with forest fuels and forecast weather needs to be made when conducting planned burns
18. The requirement for obtaining spot forecasts for planned burning should be linked to complexity and risk with appropriate oversight in place
19. Greater consideration should be given to using aircraft for burn security surveillance as well as ignition and burning out operations, in addition to aerial observation and the suppression of bushfires
20. Planning processes should be reviewed to ensure that stakeholders beyond the immediate burn area are clearly identified, prioritised and targeted with appropriate communication
21. Communication and engagement processes should be reviewed with an emphasis placed on developing and applying active and meaningful approaches rather than passive methods only
22. The Department should consider branding the component of its portfolio dealing with fire management and planned burning on public lands so that there is an enduring entity for building stronger and more sustainable relationships with the community