

Response to the recommendations of the independent investigation into the Lancefield - Cobaw fire

November 2015

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References to:

- **'Department'** means Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- **'Secretary'** means the Secretary, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- **'Chief Fire Officer'** means the Chief Fire Officer, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

Foreword

After the Lancefield - Cobaw fire broke containment lines in early October, the Government acted quickly to investigate what occurred: to provide the community with the answers that it deserves and so the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) could ensure it has the appropriate processes and structures in place to mitigate against such an incident happening again.

Bushfires are a part of summer in Victoria. Managing bushfire risk across Victoria is a challenging, yet vital task for the protection of the Victorian community and our environment.

Since the devastating 2009 bushfires, we have made significant changes to the planned burning program, focused on achieving the hectare target that was introduced in 2010, based on recommendations from the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission. Alongside this focus on achieving hectare targets, we have had to keep up with the changing needs and expectations of Victorian communities. The independent investigation into the Lancefield - Cobaw fire has recommended that improvements are required to the systems and processes that underpin the delivery of our important work throughout Victoria.

The independent investigation has shown that we need to make clear changes to ensure we are working in partnership with local communities. We accept all recommendations from this investigation and we commit to providing public updates on the work that we do to restore the community's trust in planned burning.

Coupled with the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land*, recent weeks have reinforced for us all that we need make changes in order to put the community first, as recommended in the report by the independent investigation team.

Less than 0.6 per cent of planned burns have broken containment lines in the last five years. However, we need to ensure that we have the right systems in place so that we can continue to reduce bushfire risk across Victoria and the community can have confidence in the work carried out by DELWP and its local forest firefighters.

Previously, the approach to planned burning was driven by a hectare target. The Government's response to the Inspector-General's *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land* will see us become more sophisticated in the way we manage planned burning and put local communities first. From now, we will seek to ensure our land and fire management actions are more focused on the local environment and driven by local community knowledge. The impacts of fire will be reduced, communities will be safer and the environment stronger.

Land and fire agencies will work in partnership with local communities to combine our fire science and expertise with in-depth knowledge. We are fortunate now to be better informed to target high bushfire risk areas. We put more science and rigour behind targeting risk, and through year round community input we will determine where we need to undertake planned burns, alongside our other bushfire management actions.

Work has already begun on improving DELWP's systems and processes and training our staff to better address the needs of local communities. Our forest firefighters are active members of local communities right across Victoria, who work hard to keep communities safe.

We deeply regret what occurred at Lancefield, Cobaw, Benloch and surrounds, and are committed to working together to reduce the risk of bushfire to protect people, communities, jobs and the environment.



Hon Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Environment, Climate
Change and Water



Adam Fennessy
Secretary, Department of
Environment Land, Water and
Planning



Alan Goodwin
Chief Fire Officer, Department of
Environment Land, Water and
Planning

Background on the independent investigation

The Lancefield - Cobaw Croziers Track planned burn was ignited by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) on 30 September 2015. The planned burn breached containment lines on 3 October 2015 resulting in the Lancefield - Cobaw fire, which was brought under control by DELWP and Country Fire Authority (CFA) firefighters on 4 October 2015. On 6 October 2015, further breaches of containment lines occurred. Before it was contained on 13 October 2015, the fire had burnt over 3,000 hectares, had destroyed a number of properties and other assets, and had caused significant disruption to the Lancefield, Cobaw, Benloch and surrounding communities.

On 8 October 2015, Hon Lisa Neville MP, Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water announced an independent investigation into the fire to be led by Mr Murray Carter, a fire expert and Director of the Office of the Bushfire Risk Management in Western Australia (WA). The Secretary formally established the independent investigation on 16 October 2015. Other members of the investigation team were:

- Mr Trevor Howard (Senior Fire Operations Officer, Department of Parks and Wildlife, WA)
- Mr Kevin Haylock (Director, Sandalwest Forest Management Consultants)
- Ms Vivien Philpotts (Coordinator, Lancefield Neighbourhood House)
- Ms Jo Richards (Director Regional Operations, Parks Victoria)

Scope of the independent investigation

To investigate and provide a written report that:

1. Establishes the facts and the circumstances relating to the Lancefield - Cobaw fire, including making findings in relation to:
 - a. the adequacy of planning and resourcing of the 'Lancefield - Cobaw Croziers Track' planned burn (the planned burn);
 - b. the appropriateness of the weather and other conditions for conduct of the planned burn on 30 September 2015;
 - c. what caused the planned burn to break containment lines on 3 October 2015 and on 6 October 2015;
 - d. decision making, management and control of the planned burn, including the adequacy of the patrol strategy adopted following its ignition; and
 - e. the adequacy of communication with the community in the lead up to the planned burn and after it broke containment lines.
2. Based on the findings, make any recommendations for improvement to the Secretary.

The investigation was to focus on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

The full Terms of Reference for the independent investigation are provided in **Appendix 1**.

The investigation team provided its final report to the Secretary on 4 November 2015.

In addition to its report addressing the Terms of Reference, the investigation team produced an ancillary report identifying issues raised with it by the community that were outside of the Terms of Reference. This report was provided to Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) on 4 November 2015 and will be responded to directly by EMV.

What will change

In its report, the investigation team made 22 recommendations for improvement. **DELWP accepts all recommendations**, and has provided a response to each of these in this document.

DELWP is committed to making significant changes to how it operates across the State, to improve delivery of the planned burning program. It must be noted that any planned burn – being the deliberate introduction of fire into the natural environment - carries with it risk. However, with proper management, the benefits of planned burning far outweigh the risks of undertaking it.

These changes are to minimise, to the greatest extent possible, the chance of a future planned burn breaking containment lines and impacting on people, property and the environment in the way that this fire impacted on the communities of Lancefield, Cobaw, Benloch and surrounds. However, the risk can never be totally eliminated.

The implementation of these changes has already commenced and will be promptly delivered. Key changes to accountability lines, new risk management procedures, the investigation of approvals and oversight and a statewide audit into recommendations from past investigations will be completed before the commencement of the 2016 autumn planned burning season.

These changes should be read with the Government's response to the *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land* undertaken by the Inspector-General for Emergency Management¹ – which outlines a new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria. The response is available at www.delwp.vic.gov.au/safer-together

Rebuilding community trust

DELWP's core role is the provision of services to create a liveable, inclusive and sustainable Victoria. DELWP and its staff are committed to excellence in serving local communities. At the same time, DELWP's staff are proud and active members of those local communities, right across Victoria. The Lancefield - Cobaw fire, and the factors that led to it, have damaged the trust that communities have in DELWP. The Department will restore its relationship with communities and rebuild this trust through its actions.

To do this, DELWP will:

- Develop and publish a community service charter (our promise to the Victorian community) that will describe how DELWP will partner with and involve local communities in decision making about public land and bushfire management – drawing on their knowledge and experience all year round.
- Engage with communities before, during and after a planned burn is undertaken. This means doing more than putting an advertisement in a newspaper. It means understanding how communities want to engage with DELWP and tailoring approaches accordingly. This may include holding more regular community meetings or visiting with individual community members in their homes to listen and understand their concerns. It may also involve going to areas of public land and talking with the community about where we plan to conduct a planned burn and why – and again after a planned burn is completed to discuss the effectiveness and value of the work undertaken.
- Continue to build a culture of service excellence and improve the way in which DELWP engages with the community. This will include staff and managers undertaking formal learning and development to build capability in community engagement and customer service.
- Consult with and listen to communities to understand their needs and provide the information that they require - at all stages of the planned burning program and during bushfire response.
- Develop and build a 'brand' for forest firefighters that is recognisable and long lasting. Consistent with the recommendation of the investigation team, a brand is important for staff and the community in building relationships and recognition for the work that is undertaken to reduce the risk of bushfire and protect communities and the environment.

¹ The State of Victoria Melbourne (2015). *Safer Together: A new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria*.

Making it clear who is in charge of the planned burning program

Planned burning, like bushfire and emergency response operations, requires a well defined management hierarchy, so that the lines of accountability are clear, there is strong oversight and decision making authority is delegated to appropriate levels commensurate with risk. These management arrangements will apply to all aspects of delivery of the planned burning program. It will be clear who is accountable for delivery of the planned burning program within DELWP.

To do this, DELWP will:

- Make the Chief Fire Officer report directly to the Secretary and have accountability for bushfire management operations, including delivery of the planned burning program.
- Create a single line of responsibility for bushfire prevention, preparedness and response – including planned burning – from state through to local levels. Under this proposal, Assistant Chief Fire Officers reporting through to the Chief Fire Officer will be appointed in each DELWP region. The Assistant Chief Fire Officers will be responsible for integrated planning, operational delivery, and community engagement for bushfire management. Further and detailed consultation with staff will be undertaken on this proposal.
- Improve the accountability, structures and management processes for all non-bushfire land management services it provides to local communities, including maintenance of roads and bridges, and pest and weed control. Further and detailed consultation with staff will be undertaken on this proposal.

Implementing improved systems and processes

The decision making and approvals systems and processes used by DELWP to guide delivery of the planned burning program will require a comprehensive risk assessment. This will ensure that the approach to the conduct of a planned burn will always be appropriate to the level of risk. The risk will be reviewed at all stages so that the changing context in which a planned burn is undertaken is fully considered – the weather conditions, how dry the landscape is, the amount of fuel on adjacent land, and the important assets on neighbouring properties.

To do this, DELWP will:

- Implement improved risk management and approvals systems and processes for delivery of the planned burning program that are consistent with international best practice in risk management (ISO31000). This means working with the community and using the best available information to comprehensively assess the risks associated with a planned burn before, during and after it is conducted, and ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to manage the risk – including adequate resourcing. DELWP will ensure that there is appropriate review and oversight of a planned burn, including that when the risk is determined to be high enough, the Chief Fire Officer has final approval as to whether a planned burn will go ahead.
- Ensure that the assessment of risk looks beyond the boundaries of public land. Together with other land managers and partner agencies, including the CFA, risks will be identified and managed across all land tenures, including roadsides.
- Train staff involved in the planned burning program in the revised risk management processes, including improving the identification and management of risks.
- Build improved quality control steps into all parts of the planned burning program. Planned burn approvals will be made at the appropriate level, by experienced staff that understand the local conditions, and each stage of the approval process will be undertaken by a different person whose role will be clearly identified in the management structure.
- Work in close partnership with EMV, CFA and other land managers to reduce bushfire fuels across public and private land.
- Work with VicRoads and local government to support better management of roadside vegetation. This means reducing high fuels loads that occur on roadsides that can allow a bushfire to spread and make it difficult for firefighters to gain access and control.
- Look for opportunities to make firewood that is produced during fire response and fuel management operations available to local communities.

Addressing other issues in the planned burning program

The independent investigation focussed on the conduct of a single planned burn in DELWP's Midlands district. Before March 2016, DELWP will determine whether identified issues with decision making, approvals and oversight are restricted to that planned burn and district or are evident in other parts of the state. Any issues identified will be addressed.

To do this, DELWP will:

- Investigate the conduct of the approvals and oversight process for the Lancefield - Cobaw Crozier's Track planned burn, building on and consistent with the independent investigation.
- Conduct a statewide audit of compliance with current standards, directions, instructions and guidelines issued by the Chief Fire Officer for the approval and oversight of a planned burn.
- Conduct a statewide audit into the implementation of recommendations arising from past examinations, investigations or audits of planned burns that have breached containment lines since 2003.

Building on the positives

While the investigation team identified areas for improvement, it also identified a number of positive aspects related to the Lancefield - Cobaw fire. These aspects and the many strengths and good practices that are undertaken across the state will be built upon in making changes to how the planned burning program is delivered. These include the strong integration of forest and fire management, the experience and competency of staff, gender diversity and a strong safety culture.

To do this, DELWP will:

- Engage with its staff, CFA and EMV to ensure that the best operational practices that exist in regions and districts are identified and applied statewide.
- Ensure that the positive findings of the investigation team are applied in implementing improved systems and processes. The investigation team noted examples of individual good practices and decision making, and of collective good practices such as the auditing and management of hazardous trees. The investigation team noted the professionalism of staff and their willingness to learn and improve. This will be important as DELWP goes about reforming its approach to planned burning.
- Collaborate with CFA on better approaches to develop skills and build Victoria's overall capability and capacity in fire management. This includes identifying more opportunities to share knowledge and experience between agencies, such as drawing on the expertise of DELWP's staff in forest firefighting to improve skills and capabilities.

Independent oversight

There will be independent monitoring and reporting on the implementation of recommendations and the changes that DELWP has committed to making. This includes that strong and effective partnerships are in place between DELWP, EMV, CFA and others to manage bushfire risks across private and public land. In addition, regular auditing of planned burning will be undertaken to facilitate the maintenance of standards, continuous improvement and the management of risks at all levels.

To do this, DELWP will:

- Request the IGEM to monitor and report on progress in making changes to how it operates and in implementing the response to the independent investigation's recommendations. These reports will be made public.
- Ask the IGEM to manage the prompt investigation and reporting of any future breaches of containment lines by a planned burn, drawing on relevant independent experts as required. These reports will be made public.
- Commission regular, independent auditing of the planned burning program. These reports will be made public.

Response to individual recommendations

The adequacy of planning and resourcing of the 'Lancefield - Cobaw Croziers Track' planned burn

Recommendation 3.1.1.5: The Department must adopt a tenure-blind approach to the management of bushfire risk including the planning of burns

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP's responsibilities for prevention and suppression of fire on public land are established under the *Forests Act 1958*, and the Emergency Management Manual Victoria.

The Government's response to the IGEM's *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land* recognises the need for a broader approach to bushfire management that considers the full range of options to manage bushfire risk across public and private land, and across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities. This reflects the intent of the IGEM's recommendations and is consistent with feedback from independent experts, stakeholders and the community.

To assist in protecting communities and the environment, a tenure-blind approach will be adopted to manage the risk of bushfire. To implement this, DELWP and other land and fire agencies will work together and with communities to plan and deliver bushfire management activities across public and private land. This includes DELWP, CFA, local government, VicRoads and other landholders working in partnership to manage bushfire fuels across the boundaries of forests and parks, onto private property and roadsides.

Timeframe: Implementation to commence immediately with annual reviews.

Recommendation 3.1.1.6: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

In his *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land* and consistent with the investigation team, the IGEM stated that effective bushfire management requires an integrated mix of strategies for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The IGEM also stated that shifting from a hectare-based performance target to a risk reduction target will more effectively focus the attention of planners, communities and emergency management stakeholders on the varying contributions to bushfire risk, how best to reduce them and the nature of trade-offs between bushfire risk and other values. The Government has accepted the IGEM's recommendation to adopt a risk reduction target.

In responding to the IGEM's review, the Government has recognised the need for a broader approach to bushfire management that considers the full range of options to manage bushfire risk across land tenures and across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities. Following feedback from experts, stakeholders and the community, DELWP will expand its strategic bushfire management planning process to incorporate all the bushfire management activities it undertakes.

Effective bushfire management planning involves multiple agencies, including DELWP, working with communities to identify local values and priorities for protection. It also requires the expertise of land and fire managers to be brought together with input and knowledge from local communities to determine the right mix of strategies – from prevention, preparedness, response and recovery – to ensure the best results for community safety, local businesses and the environment.

Timeframe: Implementation to commence immediately with annual reviews.

Recommendation 3.1.1.7: The Department should engage with EMV in seeking and implementing solutions to improving landscape scale bushfire risk management

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP will deliver on this recommendation by implementing the Government's response to the *Review into performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land* that was undertaken by IGEM, including by actively participating in the development of the State Bushfire Management Strategy. DELWP will work closely with EMV to improve landscape scale bushfire risk management approaches across tenures, ensuring alignment with the objectives and priorities established in Victoria's Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan.

Timeframe: Implementation to commence immediately, with actions ongoing.

Recommendation 3.1.2.7: The Department should undertake a thorough review of the risk management and approvals processes

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP's risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program are set out in standards, directions, instructions and guidelines that are issued by the Chief Fire Officer. DELWP has commenced a review and update of these processes to ensure that they consistent with best practice and international risk management standards (ISO31000). DELWP will engage an independent risk management expert to review these new processes, prior to incorporating them into an updated Fuel Management Manual. All staff and managers involved in the delivery of the planned burning program will be trained in risk management.

Implementation of these improved processes will require:

- Risk assessments to take into account the broader context in which a planned burn will take place, including risk across public and private land boundaries and uncertainties that could affect achievement of the planned burn objectives.
- The Burn Officer-in-Charge to be involved in the conduct of the risk assessment.
- Resourcing and approval of planned burns to be appropriate to the level of risk.
- Operational contingencies to be considered throughout the process, from planning through to ignition.

The assessment of risk will be regularly reviewed and updated by those conducting a planned burn as conditions change and new information becomes available. The Chief Fire Officer will require the Burn Controller to undertake a risk assessment when triggers relating to changed weather and fire behaviour conditions are exceeded.

While these improvements are being made, the approval of all planned burns will be undertaken by the Chief Fire Officer.

Timeframe: Underway, with improved processes to be implemented by March 2016 and training to be completed by July 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.2.8: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require:

- Risks to be clearly identified and classified.
- Appropriate risk mitigation strategies to be implemented.
- Peer review and other quality control steps to be built into all parts of the planned burning program.
- Approvals to be made at the right level, by experienced staff that understand the local conditions.
- Approvals to be reviewed if a planned burn is postponed or changed.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.2.9: Context setting and contingency planning should be specifically included within the reformed risk management processes

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require:

- Context setting and contingency planning to be conducted, including that risks are identified and managed across neighbouring land, regardless of its tenure.
- Uncertainties identified in the risk assessment process to be addressed.
- Contingency plans to be clearly communicated to all staff involved in the conduct of a planned burn.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.2.10: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require:

- A burn plan to be reviewed and the risk profile to be reassessed at each stage of the approvals process.
- Approval of a planned burn to be elevated through the management hierarchy if there is an increase in risk not foreseen during the preparation of the burn plan.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.2.11: A burn scheduled for ignition must have a current and useful risk assessment

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require:

- All planned burns scheduled for ignition to have a current and useful risk assessment.
- The risk assessment process to be dynamic, interactive and responsive to change.
- A review of the operational risk assessment to be conducted prior to igniting a planned burn, with an emphasis on reassessing potential control issues, contingency planning, and community and firefighter safety.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.2.12: The approach to audits of hazardous tree assessments and associated works should be extended to other aspects of burn planning, preparation and implementation

This recommendation is accepted.

An audit and quality assurance framework is being developed for all stages of a planned burn, including planning, preparation and implementation. The approach to audits of hazardous tree assessments and associated works, which sees internal peer review by experienced staff, is being considered in the development of this end-to-end framework.

Implementation of this framework will also include regular independent auditing of the planned burning program.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by July 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.3.7: 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

The Chief Fire Officer will report directly to the Secretary and have accountability for bushfire management operations, including delivery of the planned burning program.

To improve risk management, quality control and governance, there will be a single line of responsibility for bushfire prevention, preparedness and response operations (including planned burning) from state through to local levels.

To achieve this, DELWP is proposing to appoint Assistant Chief Fire Officers in each of its six regions. These Assistant Chief Fire Officers would report through to the Chief Fire Officer and carry out the functions and responsibilities of the Chief Fire Officer in each region. To achieve better integration at the local level, it is proposed that regional and district reporting structures be realigned so that these Assistant Chief Fire Officers are clearly responsible for integrated (strategic, operational and tactical) planning, delivery, and community engagement for bushfire management operations. We will ensure that all staff and managers are clear on their roles and responsibilities.

Further detailed consultation with DELWP staff will be undertaken on this proposal.

Timeframe: To commence immediately for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.3.8: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require that a Burn Officer-in-Charge with knowledge and experience appropriate to the level of risk is actively involved from the beginning of the planning process.

In addition, DELWP will review and strengthen its current accreditation system for the role of Burn Officer-in-Charge, considering the approach that is used for Incident Management Teams in bushfire and emergency response. Under this approach a Burn Officer-in-Charge would be required to hold a higher level of accreditation in order to be appointed to manage a more complex and higher risk planned burn.

Consistent with the Government's response to the IGEM's *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land*, DELWP will work with partner agencies, including CFA, to build the number of highly skilled personnel that can fill the role of Burn Officer-in-Charge.

Timeframe: Underway, with improved processes to be implemented by March 2016 and review of the accreditation system to be completed by July 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.3.9: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

The Chief Fire Officer has issued a direction that requires a single Burn Officer-in-Charge to be appointed to provide operational continuity across days of ignition and planned burn management, subject to compliance with staff safety, wellbeing and fatigue management policies. The Burn Controller will provide additional oversight during all stages of a planned burn.

The direction states that where it is not possible to appoint a single Burn Officer-in-Charge, then an alternative officer who has appropriate knowledge, experience and situational awareness must be in place to provide continuity. This

direction aims to ensure the right skills and expertise are available throughout the conduct of a planned burn and that there is effective handover to maintain operational continuity.

Consistent with the Government's response to the IGEM's *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land*, DELWP will work with partner agencies including CFA to build the number of highly skilled personnel that can fill the role of Burn Officer-in-Charge.

Timeframe: Immediate and ongoing.

Recommendation 3.1.3.10: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

The Chief Fire Officer is responsible for monitoring the performance of the planning, preparation and implementation of a planned burn, through compliance with standards, directions, instructions and guidelines that the Chief Fire Officer has issued.

DELWP is developing an audit and quality assurance framework for the planned burning program, which will include independent auditing. The framework will be designed to facilitate the maintenance of standards, continuous improvement and the management of risks at all levels of DELWP.

In addition, DELWP will adopt a "Lessons Learnt" initiative, and will build on its current scenario based and experiential learning to cover all stages of a planned burn, including planning, preparation and implementation.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by July 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.4.6: Planning for resources must include any works necessary for the preparation of burns prior to the main ignition

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require planning for resources to include any works necessary for the preparation of a planned burn prior to ignition.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.4.7: Indicative resourcing of burns must take account of the risk assessment and also provide for operational contingency planning

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require:

- Risk assessments to take into account the broader context in which the planned burn will take place, including risk across public and private land boundaries and uncertainties that could affect achievement of the planned burn objectives.
- Resourcing and approval of planned burns to be commensurate to the level of risk.
- Operational contingencies to be considered throughout the planning process, from preparation of the burn plan through to ignition.

While these improvements are being made, the approval of all planned burns will be undertaken by the Chief Fire Officer.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.1.4.8: Burn OICs must be fully involved in determining appropriate levels of resourcing for different operational phases and shifts

This recommendation is accepted.

The Chief Fire Officer has issued a direction requiring that a Burn Officer-in-Charge is fully involved in determining appropriate levels of resourcing for different operational phases and shifts of a planned burn.

This direction notes that there may be circumstances where there are multiple planned burns being undertaken within a district, and resources will be shared across different burn operations based on risk and need. While the Burn Officer-in-Charge must be involved in determining the resourcing for a particular planned burn, the overall resourcing of planned burning within a district is the responsibility of the Burn Controller.

Timeframe: Immediate and ongoing.

The appropriateness of the weather and other conditions for conduct of the planned burn on 30 September 2015

Recommendation 3.2.7: Greater attention to drought factors and their interactions with forest fuels and forecast weather needs to be made when conducting planned burns

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require that drought factors and their interactions with forest fuels and forecast weather are made when conducting a planned burn. It will also require that weather information is more regularly obtained throughout the conduct of a planned burn.

DELWP will ensure that the required weather information is made available to staff undertaking a planned burn. In addition, DELWP is reviewing the training currently provided to staff in the interpretation and use of fire weather information.

Timeframe: Underway, with improved processes to be implemented by March 2016 and training to be completed by July 2016.

Recommendation 3.2.8: The requirement for obtaining spot forecasts for planned burning should be linked to complexity and risk with appropriate oversight in place

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require spot weather forecasts to be regularly obtained based on the complexity and risk of a planned burn, and will ensure that appropriate oversight is put in place.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Decision making, management and control of the planned burn, including the adequacy of the patrol strategy adopted following its ignition

Recommendation 3.4.7: 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

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP will ensure that the appropriate resources are allocated to a planned burn so that it is undertaken successfully and that the security of a planned burn can be monitored and maintained. This includes the allocation and use of

aircraft, and reinforcing the importance of post-ignition risk assessment so that resource requirements are continually reviewed throughout the conduct of a planned burn.

The Chief Fire Officer has issued a direction to ensure the regular sharing of information on changing risks at all levels of the management structure for the conduct of a planned burn (Burn Officer-in-Charge, Burn Controller, Regional Agency Commander and State Agency Commander). This will allow for improved oversight of a planned burn, including that mitigation actions are taken, resourcing is reviewed, and timely and relevant communication is provided to local communities on changed circumstances.

DELWP is currently investigating the increased use of emerging technologies such as forward-looking infra-red and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of planned burn surveillance.

Timeframe: Underway completion by March 2016.

The adequacy of communication with the community in the lead up to the planned burn and after it broke containment lines

Recommendation 3.5.8: Planning processes should be reviewed to ensure that stakeholders beyond the immediate burn area are clearly identified, prioritised and targeted with appropriate communication

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is improving its risk management and approvals processes for the planned burning program to ensure they are consistent with best practice and international risk management standards. Implementation of these improved processes will require neighbours and other community members beyond the immediate planned burn area to be clearly identified and prioritised. Information will be provided in ways that best suit the needs of communities at all stages of the process – before, during and after the conduct of a planned burn.

In addition, DELWP will develop measures to monitor and report on the quality and effectiveness of its engagement with communities.

Timeframe: Underway for completion by March 2016.

Recommendation 3.5.9: Communication and engagement processes should be reviewed with an emphasis placed on developing and applying active and meaningful approaches rather than passive methods only

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is focussed on communication and engagement and involving local communities in decision making about bushfire management all year round.

DELWP will review its communication and engagement processes and emphasise the importance of local relationships. It will discuss in detail with local communities which active communication and engagement processes are most meaningful to them, and tailor approaches accordingly.

In doing this, DELWP will also investigate the use of the methods and tools (such as automated text messages) that are currently used during bushfire and emergency response to raise community awareness in the delivery of the planned burning program.

To support success, DELWP will build the capability of its staff in community engagement and customer service through formal learning and development.

Timeframe: To commence immediately for completion by July 2016.

Recommendation 3.5.10: The Department should consider branding the component of its portfolio dealing with fire management and planned burning on public land so that there is an enduring entity for building stronger and more sustainable relationships with the community

This recommendation is accepted.

DELWP is aware of the importance of a 'brand' that is recognisable and long lasting in building relationships with the community and ensuring staff are recognised for the work that they undertake to reduce the risk of bushfires and protect communities and the environment.

DELWP will undertake further engagement with staff, partner agencies, the community and other stakeholders in finalising a 'brand' for forest firefighters.

Timeframe: To commence immediately for completion by March 2016.

Reporting

Reporting on progress and achievements in implementing changes to the way DELWP delivers the planned burning program and the responses to the recommendations made by the investigation team will be provided to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water; the Secretary; and made available to the community.

Clarifications

Authorisation to ignite the planned burn

In Table 2 on page 8 of its report, the investigation team states that the person that authorised the ignition of the planned burn was not clearly identified. The Lancefield - Cobaw Croziers Track planned burn was authorised by the Acting Fire Manager in the Midlands district and this is recorded in DELWP's online information management system (FireWeb).

Conduct of an internal fire investigation

On page 20 of its report, the investigation team notes that an internal fire investigation in accordance with the normal procedural requirements was not done for the Lancefield - Cobaw fire. The decision was made by the Secretary to appoint an independent investigation team to undertake the investigation into this fire. The requirements of section 6.4 of the *Fire Management Manual 10.1: Planned Burning* were considered in developing the Terms of Reference for the independent investigation.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

Commencement:

Week commencing 11 October 2015

Investigators:

Lead investigator: Mr Murray Carter, Director WA Office of Bushfire Management Investigation team:

- Trevor Howard (Senior Fire Operations Officer, Department of Parks and Wildlife, WA)
- Kevin Haylock (Director, Sandalwest Forest Management Consultants)
- Vivien Philpotts (Coordinator, Lancefield Neighbourhood House)
- Jo Richards (Director Regional Operations, Parks Victoria)

Scope:

Investigate and provide a written report that:

1. Establishes the facts and the circumstances relating to the Lancefield - Cobaw fire, including making findings in relation to:
 - a. the adequacy of planning and resourcing of the 'Lancefield - Cobaw Croziers Track' planned burn (the planned burn);
 - b. the appropriateness of the weather and other conditions for conduct of the planned burn on 30 September 2015;
 - c. what caused the planned burn to break containment lines on 3 October 2015 and on 6 October 2015;
 - d. decision making, management and control of the planned burn, including the adequacy of the patrol strategy adopted following its ignition; and
 - e. the adequacy of communication with the community in the lead up to the planned burn and after it broke containment lines.
2. Based on the findings, make any recommendations for improvement to the Secretary. The investigation is to focus on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

Delivery of final report:

The final report is to be delivered to the Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning within 3 weeks of the commencement of the investigation.

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