

Response to the Recommendations from the ACT Multi-Hazard Advisory Council report on: Bushfire Management Arrangements in the ACT 2022

Recommendation Number	Recommendation	Response	Noted / Agreed / Agreed-in-Principle / Not Agreed
1. ESA	<p>The SBMP 5 should explicitly address climate-related increases in bushfire risk by identifying strategic objectives and associated outcome measures for bushfire risk management including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of life and property outcomes • Ecological, social, cultural, water and economic outcomes • Community, agency and government preparedness: capability for response and for recovery so that we can more easily see progress and so that the areas needing more attention – more work, more information, more innovation – can be more easily identified. 	<p>Development of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) v5 is underway. Climate change adaptation will be prioritised throughout this next version of the SBMP.</p> <p>SBMP v5 will go through many phases of public and key stakeholder consultation, and from this the plan’s themes will be identified.</p> <p>ACT Government has acknowledged climate change and acceptance of this will also have a significant impact on the drafting of objectives and actions in SBMP v5.</p>	Agreed
2. ESA	<p>The ACT Government should develop a 5 year plan for further development of Territory-wide geospatial planning of bushfire mitigation and response activities, seeking to build planning tools and processes that underpin a rolling prioritised risk management program, appropriate to the increased bushfire risks predicted for future climate scenarios, that support integrated evaluation of all options against protection of life and assets, ecological, water, cultural, social and economic outcomes. Such tools would both underpin and be informed by the Regional Fire Management Plan (RFMP) and the development of annual Bushfire Operations Plans (BOP) and Farm FireWise plans.</p>	<p>The SBMP is a 5-year plan that is supported by the EPSDD RFMP which details the risk mitigation work undertaken by ACT Government Land Managers over 5 years with a 10-year outlook. The RFMP is delivered through the BOP developed by PCS and monitored by the ACTRFS.</p> <p>SBMP is the legislated overarching bushfire plan for the ACT with objectives focused on risk identification and reduction.</p> <p>The creation of the Territory tenure blind BOP (overseeing and reviewing all BOP activities and actions) coupled with the RFMP, Farm Firewise and a robust auditing process, will address this recommendation. This is supported by ESA’s comprehensive geospatial capability and its virtual</p>	Noted

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		intelligence hub that operates in accordance with industry best practice.	
<p>3.</p> <p>ESA</p> <p>EPSDD</p>	<p>EPSDD and ESA should jointly commission appropriate fire experts to conduct an independent analysis of fire management programs since 2003 with a view to establishing which activities have assisted bushfire suppression operations and how mitigation activities have impacted on environmental, cultural and water catchment values, with a view to the lessons learnt from this analysis informing future policy and planning.</p>	<p>EPSDD and ACTRFS have appropriately skilled and qualified staff that monitor and determine best practise to manage fire risk. Additionally, EPSDD, PCS and Conservation Research team have embedded expertise in land and fire management.</p> <p>Existing and developing models for prediction draw on the learning from previous incidents and frame future responses. The Phoenix modelling capability that underpins EPSDD residual risk assessment is one example of this. The capability is being further enhanced to address ecological and ecosystem service values.</p> <p>There are many variables to be considered when looking into past incidents and management programs, particularly with a changing climate. The focus should be to adapt to the changing environment and climate drivers.</p> <p>Both EPSDD and ACTESA have processes in place to monitor and implement recommendations from Royal Commissions, Coronial findings, and enquiries.</p> <p>The SBMP Governance Committee (chaired by an independent Executive) has direct responsibility for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on the progress of</p>	<p>Noted</p>

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		SBMP objectives and actions and ensuring that the SBMP's objectives are met.	
4. ESA	The ACT Government should introduce policies, standards, tools and procedures to ensure the availability of comprehensive, structured data describing future bushfire events and support the creation of an integrated bushfire data management system that holds data on bushfire detection, bushfire mitigation, bushfire suppression activities and bushfire outcomes.	<p>Systems currently exist where ESA and EPSDD can look at previous burnt areas and mitigation activities. The ESA Common Operating Picture (ESA COP) has the capability to include additional layers as per the recommendation.</p> <p>Existing and developing models for prediction draw on the learning from previous incidents and frame future responses. The Phoenix modelling capability that underpins EPSDD residual risk assessment is one example of this. The capability is being further enhanced to address ecological and ecosystem service values.</p> <p>Operational fire records are captured using ICON. Geospatial data capture is undertaken by ESA Spatial Services and shared through ICON to adjoining jurisdictions. NSWRFSS have a similar system to monitor mitigation and incident related data.</p> <p>ESA and EPSDD have dedicated Fire Behaviour Analysts whose role is to provide continual strategic forward thinking and planning for the Agency.</p> <p>The capture of the fire related data is well described in shared policies and endorsed doctrine of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC).</p>	Noted

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5. EPSDD	EPSDD should continue its work to recognise and understand the historic use of fire by the traditional owners of lands of the ACT, and its role in indigenous culture and to integrate this knowledge into land and fire management practices, and to support Traditional Owners to implement more cultural burning programs.	EPSDD has a longstanding commitment to learn from First Nations fire management practice. The agency is now focusing on enabling Ngunnawal cultural practice through fire. This approach is supported by ACTRFS and rural landholders.	Agreed
6 ESA	A review of the implementation of the SBMP be made by an entity external to the ACT Government at least once each planning cycle to examine resourcing, achievement of planned risk mitigation and risk response measures, and ultimately the achievement of bushfire management objectives.	<p>The objectives within the SBMP are implemented by multiple Directorates and the establishment of the governance committee and board (with an independent chair) provide a sound level of oversight.</p> <p>The SBMP Governance Committee has direct responsibility for the ongoing review, monitoring and reporting on the progress of SBMP objectives and actions to ensure the SBMP's objectives are met. The Council is an observer on the Committee.</p> <p>The SBMP has a governance plan that enables the effective oversight of the delivery of the SBMP, ensuring strategies are implemented and actions achieved. A range of existing data sets and performance indicators are used to measure the effectiveness of the SBMP.</p> <p>Regular monitoring and reporting on these indicators encourages ongoing performance improvement and innovation.</p>	Noted

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7. ESA / JACS	Reporting on implementation of all recommendations from inquiries into relevant bushfires be included in the Whole of Government annual reporting process.	<p>The implementation of recommendations arising from external scrutiny (ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiries for example) is currently reported through the annual reporting process. The exception to this is those Inquiries for which other entities are responsible eg coronial Inquiries.</p> <p>In addition, for the first time in 2021-22, the Annual Report directions were amended to provide for whole of Government reporting on the delivery of actions within the SBMP. This will be ongoing.</p>	Noted
8. ESA EPSDD	<p>10-year capability plans for relevant government agencies including ESA and EPSDD are developed to identify the capability that will be required in the medium term for increasingly long concurrent multiple disasters, including campaign bushfires – and to then be resourced to develop and maintain that capability. This includes maintaining capability in both agencies in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bushfire forecasting, analysis and planning • Senior incident management roles, particularly Level 2 and 3 incident controllers, with experience in managing large bushfires • Remote area firefighting • Operational bushfire response and community asset protection units 	<p>The SBMP, Service and Agency Business plans, the ACT Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework capture current and future capability requirements.</p> <p>EPSDD will prioritise workforce planning in the next year with a focus on priorities identified by the Council. EPSDD is working closely with ESA and ACTRFS to address this issue.</p> <p>Forecasting resourcing into the ‘future’ will need to look beyond 10 years, particularly vehicles and facilities as they tend to be 25 plus year life cycles. Advances in technology, a changing climate and funding will be key factors in determining and drafting future capability plans.</p>	Noted

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of bushfire data, research, technology development, innovation and adoption programs, including in partnership with research institutions and non-government organisations. 	<p>The SBMP provides the strategic framework to deliver this recommendation. The preparation of the SBMP v5 will retain capability maintenance and development as a priority across government.</p>	
<p>9. ESA/ EPSDD</p>	<p>The ACT Government should develop and review policies to underpin increasing capability for bushfire risk management, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a suite of social, cultural, ecological and economic objectives for bushfire management • Developing and using processes to set levels of acceptable risk against which to evaluate options for bushfire mitigation • Identifying the necessary agency capabilities and resourcing required to achieve desired objectives for bushfire management • Promoting community capability to appropriately prepare for bushfires and supporting community response and recovery from bushfire incidents • Identifying and where possible reducing unnecessary planning and development requirements that currently apply to bushfire mitigation activities and increase cost for little environmental or social benefit. • Promoting and supporting the incorporation of science and innovation into ACT's bushfire management 	<p>The ACT Government has a robust level of governance that includes regular reviews of legislation, plans and policies like the SBMP, RFMP, BOP, Bushfire Management Standards and Capability Framework.</p> <p>Through established partnerships both internal and external to government, bushfire risk is monitored in planning, preparedness, response, and recovery phases.</p> <p>The Security and Emergency Management Policy Group regularly convene to review and/or draft policy relating to all hazard responses for the Territory.</p> <p>EPSDD and ESA actively engage with community groups to educate and increase resilience relating to preparedness, response, and recovery.</p> <p>The preparation of the SBMP v5 provides the opportunity to review the policies that support capability for bushfire risk management.</p>	<p>Noted</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring continuity of operation in essential services such as hospitals, power and telecommunication. 		
<p>10. ESA EPSDD</p>	<p>The Memorandum of Understanding for bushfire responsibilities between ESA and EPSDD be reviewed at least biennially to ensure that it contains appropriate mechanisms for such things as complementary human resources management and training; purchase and use of equipment, sharing of information between counterparts across all levels of seniority.</p>	<p>The MOU between ESA and EPSDD is a live document capable of being amended as required. It is reviewed annually as part of preparedness cycle and is reviewed and formally endorsed every 5 years A review of the Memorandum of Understanding between ESA and EPSDD will be undertaken in 2023.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>11. ESA</p>	<p>The ACT government should conduct a forward-looking assessment of the annual resource levels required to implement SBMP5, published to accompany the release of SBMP5; noting the desired improvements in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparedness, including community cohesion & volunteering • Bushfire risk management planning and data management • Mitigation of bushfire risk especially for the western and northern edges of Canberra and maintenance of the strategic fire access network • Early bushfire detection including testing of new technologies • Bushfire suppression resources • Recovery 	<p>The <i>Emergencies Act 2004</i> (the Act) requires the ESA Commissioner to prepare, and the Minister to approve, the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) for the Territory every five years. Section 74 of the Act outlines the SBMP, provides the basis for an analysis and assessment of bushfire risk along with outlining bushfire prevention, preparation and response activities that should be undertaken by agencies and our community.</p> <p>Further, section 76 of the Act requires that, after the Minister makes the strategic bushfire plan, the Commissioner to conduct an assessment, based on the plan, of available resources and capabilities for bushfire prevention and preparedness.</p>	<p>Noted</p>

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		<p>The resources required to implement the objectives of the SBMP will vary every year, reflecting seasonal and operational priorities. They may also change over the life of the SBMP to reflect changes in the ACT's risk profile.</p> <p>It is expected that the SBMP's objectives can be delivered within existing resources under the ACT Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework. However, given the long-term nature of the SBMP, additional funding may be required. This would need to be considered within the whole-of-government budgetary framework.</p>	
<p>12. ESA</p>	<p>The ACT Government should introduce a system by which the resources available to provide bushfire protection along the rural-urban interface automatically increases to be commensurate with the length of rural-urban interface managed.</p>	<p>The Bushfire Prone Area is regularly reviewed and refined by the Territory to reflect changes in land use and tenure to address local and site-specific issues.</p> <p>ESA Business rules and the National Capability Framework determine resources for incident response and BOP plans determine the resources needed for fire protection and prevention works. These are reviewed and updated when required.</p> <p>The review of the Bushfire Management Standards requires bushfire risk mitigation to be incorporated into the design and development on the urban interface.</p>	<p>Noted</p>

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13. ESA	The ACT Government should introduce policies, procedures and approaches for supporting and empowering communities and individuals to identify their own resources, capabilities and needs, and to do their own planning for bushfire preparedness and response. In doing this, to be especially cognisant of changing demographics and vulnerabilities in northern and western edges of Canberra.	<p>Current community engagement and preparedness activities are established and capable of being adapted to the changing needs of the community.</p> <p>Communication and the dissemination of key information is a shared responsibility of ESA and other areas of Government. ESA works closely with Whole of Government Communications team in CMTEDD to ensure this occurs. Groups, such as non-English speakers and the aged, are a focus to ensure the ESA maintains effective communications with these groups.</p> <p>The ACTRFS Farm Firewise program is another example of a successful program working collaboratively with a community in a high-risk category for fire.</p> <p>The ESA aims to ensure that the community is encouraged and empowered to assist each other to understand, prepare for and respond to the call to actions provided by our warnings and alerts systems.</p> <p>The ESA provides access and links to a wide range of resources to enhance resilience in the community, for example the ACT All Hazards Survival Plan.</p>	Agreed

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14. ESA	The ACT Government should commit to an ongoing program to increase the number of Community Fire Units (CFU) in order to ensure that all suburbs that include significant areas zoned as Bushfire Prone Areas have an appropriate CFU capability. Priority should be given to the new suburbs on the western and northern edges of Canberra.	Improvements in development planning and building standards, BOP mitigation activities and urban expansion will have an impact on where resources are required. This is managed through the regular review and refinement of the Bushfire Prone Area.	Agreed-in-Principle
15. ESA	The ACT Government should introduce broader, more inclusive models of volunteering before, during and after bushfires, recognising that each person has a different capability to give, but that every contribution is valuable. A volunteer workforce that reflects the diversity of our community will have stronger connection with the broader ACT community.	Flexible volunteering already occurs across the ACT. The ESA has developed and implemented a broader model to retain volunteers and provide a wider range of opportunities for engagement. ESA has a strong working relationship with Volunteering ACT and other government and non-government groups that utilise volunteers. The ESA volunteers' support of the ACT Government's COVID response is a good example of the willingness of members to support the community.	Noted
16. ESA	The ACT Government should develop a medium term (5 year) whole of government plan for investment to attract, grow, and maintain a substantially increased volunteer workforce. The plan should be developed in consultation with the ACT community, particularly: the extant Rural Fire Service volunteers and Community Fire Unit personnel, ACT Rural Landholders, ACT Multicultural Advisory Council, the ACT Reconciliation Council, LGBTIQ+ Ministerial Advisory Council, ACT Disability Reference Group, and also with the Education and Community Services Directorates and include volunteers already working with the	The SBMP, ACTSES and ACTRFS business plans have the volunteer workforce as the key priority which supports community protection. As per recommendation 15, volunteering is part of the ACT DNA and the ESA agrees with MHAC that there should be opportunities for any member of the ACT community to be able to assist. Noting that an operational frontline role requires specific training and skills gained over many months and years, the ESA has created opportunities for members of the community to volunteer in non-frontline	Noted

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	ACT community on behalf of non-government entities (e.g. Red Cross).	roles, achieved by becoming a member of the ACTRFS and ACTSES under the flexible membership model. The ACT Government supports volunteering across the ACT through Volunteering ACT. Specific support to maintain ESA volunteers is addressed in the SBMP.	
17. EPSDD	EPSDD give bushfire considerations increased priority in planning legislation and processes and that credible bushfire experts prepare the bushfire risk assessments, so that achieving improved bushfire protection becomes a primary consideration throughout the planning and development of urban lands.	<p>The ESA has made a submission to the New Territory Plan. The draft of the Territory Plan (expected to be released by July 23) enhances the provisions related to bushfire and flood risk mitigation in response to a changing climate. This includes prohibiting new residential blocks with higher bushfire risk (i.e., with a bushfire attack level above BAL29).</p> <p>District Strategies and early planning for natural hazards will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider government strategies and policies – planning, transport, climate change, living infrastructure, urban tree canopy cover, biodiversity values etc – while also minimising bushfire and flooding risk. • Provide a strategic framework for more detailed planning and investigations for areas of change and growth to take place. • Require planning for districts to focus on risk mitigation of natural hazards, including alignment with ACT Government policies and risk 	Noted

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		<p>assessments, e.g., ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan 2019-24.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform district policies in the new Territory Plan in relation to natural hazards 	
18. ESA	The ACT Government ensure that plans under the Emergencies Act 2004 are appropriately recognised within other ACT planning instruments, particularly those relating to land use, development and construction.	<p>This is currently occurring.</p> <p>SEMPG and SEMSOG review and amend legislation/plans when required and/or as part of the governance review cycle. As these plans are reviewed/drafted, relevant changes and references are added.</p>	Noted
19. ESA	The ACT government should develop prescriptions for the overall acceptable bushfire risk for a development area against which variations in individual protective measures can be assessed for the contribution they make to that overall risk protection level.	<p>EPSDD planning legislation and bushfire management standards will outline development requirements for a Bushfire Prone Area in the ACT.</p> <p>The ACT Bushfire Management Standards provide an evidence-based requirement to inform development in the Bushfire Prone Area.</p>	Noted
20. EPSDD ESA	The ACT Government should take urgent action to mandate that all new and substantially altered buildings within Bushfire Prone Areas comply with AS3959 to reduce their vulnerability to increased levels of bushfire risk, and conduct and publish the results of audits of existing building stock within Bushfire Prone Areas.	<p>The new Bushfire Management Standards will be consistent with AS3959.</p> <p>The ACT Bushfire Management Standards provide an evidence-based requirement to inform development in the Bushfire Prone Area.</p>	Agreed

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<p>21.</p> <p>ESA</p> <p>EPSDD</p>	<p>EPSDD and ESA (RFS) each have a research and development manager responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining research and innovation priorities with respect to bushfire management objectives; • Exploring opportunities and developing strategies to address agreed research priorities • Staying on top of research findings and where appropriate ensuring their adoption • Supervising the implementation of research and innovation plans within their agency • Developing and supervising research projects conducted or commissioned by their agency, or developed in partnership with other organisations • Ensuring access to resources, data (where necessary) and expertise to conduct agreed research • Evaluating the overall benefit to be gained from proposed research • Coordinating with other ACT government agencies and non-government agencies that will participate in or directly benefit from the research 	<p>EPSDD and ACTESA are both actively collaborating with, and providing valuable inputs to, external organisations. Including the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services (AFAC) and Natural Hazards and Research Agency (NHRA).</p> <p>AFAC and NHRA are key partnerships that prioritise fire research and being cross jurisdictional at the National level, research outcomes can be leveraged and implemented where required.</p> <p>Staff within EPSDD and ACTRFS/ESA are currently actively involved with research projects such as the Remote Area Fire Detection Cameras and utilisation of drone technology. Each agency has subject matter experts that either work internally or through collaboration with research organisations looking at many aspects of fire and related topics.</p> <p>Staff are leading innovation and technology projects to future proof the services from the impacts of climate and environmental changes.</p> <p>The opportunity to build on private/public partnerships is recognised across the bushfire management community and is supported by the SBMP.</p>	<p>Noted</p>

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		<p>EPSDD has a research utilisation resource in the fire management unit targeting practice-based research and a strong fire ecology program</p>	
<p>22. ESA</p>	<p>The ACT government should develop policy to guide research and innovation for bushfire management that addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership agreements for research and development • Intellectual Property arrangements including data access rights • Adoption and communication of research outcomes • Development of business cases for adoption of new technologies or knowledge 	<p>Refer to response to recommendation 21.</p> <p>Partnership agreements are in place with research organisations that share information and funding to progress research projects and proof of concept innovations.</p> <p>The opportunity to build on private/public partnerships is recognised across the bushfire management community and is supported by the SBMP.</p> <p>The ACT will remain a stakeholder in supporting research and innovation both nationally and internationally.</p> <p>Business case development, communications and intellectual property arrangements are predominantly addressed through existing research development and contractual processes.</p>	<p>Noted</p>

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23. ESA	<p>The ACT government should develop a strategic investment plan to accelerate innovation and technological developments (and adoption) in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecasting bushfire risk and behaviour • Communications – real-time information provided to, & collected from, the community • Bushfire mitigation and suppression planning • Bushfire detection • Bushfire suppression strategies and tactics 	<p>Adaptive management is one of the key objectives of the SBMP. Investment in ongoing research, evaluation and monitoring programs is a critical element of adaptive management.</p> <p>Further, the ACT Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework continues to adapt and respond to changing requirements, including equipment and technology advancements and lessons learned from response operations.</p> <p>The ACT Government will continue to identify new technologies to complement the ACT’s existing response capabilities and importantly, to ensure these new technologies are fully integrated into response planning, procurement and maintenance in a sustainable manner.</p>	Noted