

MAD Fire FAQ



Mallacoota and District Recovery Association – Info Sheet
Webinar 3 2019/20 Bushfire Snapshot | FAQ December 2020

Fire Management Working Group – Webinar Series

Planning for fire management requires a shared, respectful discussion between the community and fire management agencies, DELWP, FFMVic, Parks and the Shire. The Fire Management Working Group is working on a series of Webinars to inform and educate - how we can make good decisions on managing the country and supporting our community to live safely with fire.



The Red Beak Orchid emerges after hot summer fires. It is the symbol of our webinar series. [credit: L Harwood]

Moisture content at the 19/20 fires was the lowest on record, with soil moisture content down below 5% in the area. There are currently no suppression methods to be able to stop a fire of the 19/20 scale and intensity.

People in towns need to consider leaving early and possibly stopping people coming into the area on bad fire danger days, as well as implementing a multi-pronged approach, such as the use of fire refuges.

[G McCarthy, DELWP]

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FIRE SCIENCE and FOREST MANAGEMENT

Understanding Fire Management

Greg McCarthy, Fire Ecologist and Fire Behaviour Analyst, DELWP

What fuel layers do we need to concentrate on?

Burning the long elevated and bark fuels provide the best long term reduction strategy in fuel management. This makes the biggest difference on spotting and flame height.

Flaming the front of the fire is the surface fine dead fuels as a substrate (<6mm) and fine live fuel (<2-3mm) (includes bark, leaves, twigs, small shrubs, grasses, and fine pieces of elevated fuels).

Property owners need to consider their fine surface and near surface fuels and bark and elevated fuels. Suggestion is to remove shrub fuels and reduce surface fuels down to lowest levels possible. Rake off fine bark from outside trees.

Effectiveness of fuel reduction burning?

The best effects are in the first three years when the surface and near surface and elevated fuels are reduced. However, research shows there are still some effects out to 10 years.

Where should we do fuel reduction?

Most house loss occurs where there is less than 100m between forest and house. There is need to consider the forest beyond that zone as well – through mechanical or burning fuel reduction for added protection.

Some research studies have shown use of understorey mulching of 40m and 60m clearing – providing 100m between forest and houses. More evidence on success of mulching is required. Thinning has provided a good effect in terms of fire behaviour and may be a good technique for fuel reduction in close proximity to houses.

The wider break the better in terms of fuel reduction but even a 2km break wouldn't stop spotting ahead of certain fires. Concentrating on fuel reduction within 100m of

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Stephanie Montague, Vegetation Fire Manager, CFA

To assess the fire risk of the landscape, firstly look at how connected the piece of land is to bushland. Is it connected to forest or a grazed paddock?

Fine or surface fuel is anything less than 6mm in width or the size of a small finger (eg. leaves, fine twigs). Lots of surface fuel will contribute to how fast the rate of spread of fire will be.

Near surface fine fuel (dead and living) – lower shrubs and bushes, in contact with surface fuel, will contribute to the rate of fire spread and flame heights.

Wattles and shrub-type plants – referred to as elevated fuels, contribute to flame heights and rate of fire spread.

Stringybark tree bark creates significant ember risk but can be removed fairly easily. The Charred trunks of ironbarks makes the bark harder to remove, making it less likely to cause ember attack.

Reducing the amount of layers in the bush through mechanical methods (bark removal /slashing / mulching) helps prevent fire moving up into trees. Planned burning of surface fuels, reduces the amount of fuel the fire can use to spread from surface layer to forest crown.

Asset protection is critical close to township infrastructure. We aim to *reduce overall fuel load to at least moderate risk. Treatments would include prescribed fire/planned burning to remove different fuel layers (fine ground, near surface, elevated and bark hazard fuels. This will help reduce ember attack and radiant heat. Reapplying fire within relevant intervals – possibly every 2-3 years to remove those fuels. [R Cutlack, DELWP*

houses and treating the broader landscape will help provide better effects to support settlements.

How can we protect our biodiversity in relation to fuel management?

Need to consider vegetation management close to the town. The larger, open canopy, mature trees with grassy understoreys would be far easier to manage in fire, compared to forests of unevenly aged trees and heavy understoreys.

Mallacoota could be a community leader in working on innovative ways to manage fuel reduction and maintain the biodiversity and aesthetic that is so important to the people of Mallacoota.

Ross Cutlack, Senior Fuel Management Planner, Forest Fire Management, DELWP

There are 4 fire management zones within a landscape.

- 1) **Asset Protection Zone** – to west of Mallacoota, where most intensive fuel treatment provided to support protection of human life, assets and infrastructure. Within close proximity to townships. Usually sitting to west and north of towns, incorporating planned burning, mechanical treatment (non-burn/understorey modification).
- 2) **Bushfire Moderation Zone** – fuel management to reduce speed and intensity of fires and protect property from ember attack. Zone often sits in corridors running north-south. Predominantly designed around protection but also for ecosystem resilience. Reduce fuels in these zones by burning every 8-10 years.
- 3) **Landscape Management Zone** – largest area of zoning within public land. These zones often have ecological focus. Look at unburn/burnt fuel management in these zones, with low intensity burning at a more frequent timeframe. Zones usually large in size with different topographical features and vegetation. North facing slopes, ridgelines and specific fuel types etc. are typically focused upon for management of these zones.
- 4) **Planned Burn Exclusion Zone** – DELWP don't actively introduce fire into these zones. Damp, wet forest areas not conducive to fire.

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