Kingborough Council

Bushfire Risk Reduction Strategy for

Council owned and managed land

2019 - 2023

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About the Strategy

Bushfire is recognised as a significant risk to the Kingborough local government area (LGA) as outlined in Kingborough Council's Strategic Risk Register. Bushfire risk reduction is a shared responsibility between state and local government land management agencies and private landowners.

Under the *Fire Service Act 1979* all landholders including local Councils have an obligation to manage fire risk on their land. This strategy and the associated **Bushfire Risk Reduction Delivery Plan** have been developed in order to address that responsibility for Kingborough Council owned and managed land.
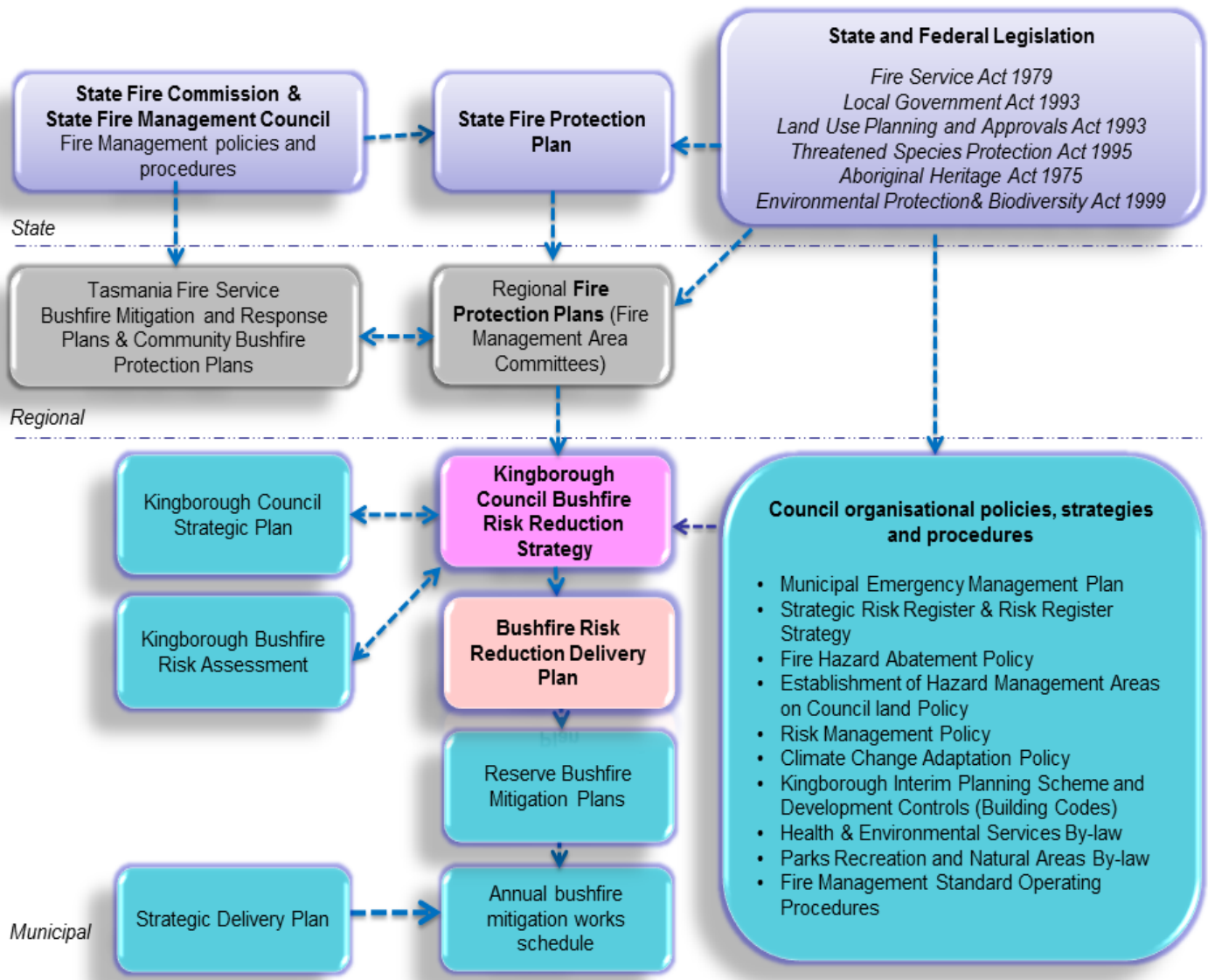
Council also has statutory obligations under the *Local Government Act 1933* to address the issue of fire hazards and fire hazard abatement on private land within the municipality. Council has a separate program, policy and procedures to deal with managing fire hazard abatement issues on private land and they are not considered within this strategy.

The overall aim of the Kingborough Council Bushfire Risk Reduction Strategy is to guide Council in the development of plans, initiatives and reduction actions designed to achieve the most efficient and effective bushfire risk reduction on Council owned or managed land using available resources.

This Bushfire Risk Reduction Strategy sets out Council's strategic approach to managing fire risk in its natural area reserves with highest bushfire risk. This strategy will assist in improving Council's preparedness for the likely increased frequency and severity of fire events under a changing climate.

The planning hierarchy for this document and related reserve fire management plans is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Bushfire Risk Reduction Strategy Framework

State Fire Commission & State Fire Management Council
Fire Management policies and procedures

State Fire Protection Plan

State and Federal Legislation

Fire Service Act 1979
Local Government Act 1993
Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993
Threatened Species Protection Act 1995
Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975
Environmental Protection& Biodiversity Act 1999

State

Tasmania Fire Service Bushfire Mitigation and Response Plans & Community Bushfire Protection Plans

Regional **Fire Protection Plans** (Fire Management Area Committees)

Regional

Kingborough Council Strategic Plan

Kingborough Council Bushfire Risk Reduction Strategy

Kingborough Bushfire Risk Assessment

Bushfire Risk Reduction Delivery Plan

Council organisational policies, strategies and procedures

- Municipal Emergency Management Plan
- Strategic Risk Register & Risk Register Strategy
- Fire Hazard Abatement Policy
- Establishment of Hazard Management Areas on Council land Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Climate Change Adaptation Policy
- Kingborough Interim Planning Scheme and Development Controls (Building Codes)
- Health & Environmental Services By-law
- Parks Recreation and Natural Areas By-law
- Fire Management Standard Operating Procedures

Reserve Bushfire Mitigation Plans

Strategic Delivery Plan

Annual bushfire mitigation works schedule

Municipal

Our vision

Our vision for Kingborough is to be efficient and effective in the reduction of bushfire risk on Council owned or managed land in order to protect people, assets, ecological values and other things valuable to the community.

Our Mission

The intent of this Bushfire Reduction Strategy is:

a) to guide Council in the development of actions that will deliver reduced bushfire risk on Council owned and managed land;
b) to guide Council in the prioritisation and efficient use of available resources on the basis of risk;
c) to assist Council to achieve bushfire risk reduction on Council owned or managed land;
d) to complement the work of other fire management agencies in reducing the risk to the community from bushfire; and
e) to assist Council in maintaining a balance between reducing bushfire risk and maintaining the natural, cultural and social values of its natural areas reserves.

Background

Managing bushfire risk is a complex task that extends across all land tenures and administrative boundaries. Bushfire risk reduction is a shared responsibility between all landowners and managers including government agencies and private landholders. This strategy outlines Councils involvement in bushfire reduction on Council owned or managed land.

Bushfire risk varies from location to location depending upon land use and a range of other factors including vegetation type, flammability and fuel loads, land slope and topography and proximity of assets to bushfire prone vegetation. Given these conditions, it is imperative that Council has a clear understanding of its role in bushfire risk reduction and understands where the highest bushfire risk is located.

Reducing risk from bushfire on Council owned or managed land, whilst at the same time ensuring that it provides stewardship of the natural, cultural and recreational values of public natural area reserves, are key challenges. A fundamental step to meeting these challenges is to measure environmental values and identify priority risk areas.

Assessing the risk of bushfire in and around Council's natural areas reserves will inform decision making and provide perspective for decisions based on the likelihood of a bushfire event occurring and the expected consequences. Assessing and determining the extent of risk at a specific location will inform whether the risk is prioritised for reduction measures and also influence selection of the most appropriate treatment option and ongoing management requirements.

What is at risk from bushfire?

The bushland of the Kingborough municipality presents a bushfire risk to the following:

1.   Human Life

The Kingborough LGA is classified as an urban local government area and has a population of approximately 37,000 people who reside in a mix of larger urban settlements as well as semi-rural and rural settings. The LGA is experiencing a period of rapid population growth and is one of the fastest growing in the state. The number of occupied private dwellings in the LGA exceeds 13,600. A large proportion of the population within the LGA lives in close proximity to vegetation that meets the definition of bushfire prone, putting them at risk from bushfires.

2.   Significant assets
- Human Settlement Areas (HSAs) – includes all habitable buildings and other structures, both residential and commercial;
- Critical infrastructure, which includes:
  - Electricity transmission lines and associated infrastructure. Transmission lines within the LGA form a critical component of Tasmania's electricity grid and a bushfire may cause significant economic and social disruption;
  - Communications towers – includes radio and mobile communications towers. Infrastructure associated with mobile phones, internet, microwave radio links, trunk mobile radio and private mobile radio (PMR) are critical for providing warnings and for firefighting communications;
  - Water supply - North West Bay water catchment and associated main line and infrastructure. North West Bay River provides water supply to Hobart and surrounding areas. A high intensity bushfire impacting on the catchment has the potential to adversely affect water supply; and
  - Sewerage infrastructure – damage to sewerage infrastructure has the potential to impact on human health following a disaster as well as potential environmental impacts resulting in harmful algal blooms and mass fish kill events as well as drinking water contamination.
  - Roads and tracks

3.   Natural and cultural values
Threatened or endangered ecosystems, animal or plant species as well as places and artefacts of cultural value can be damaged and destroyed by fire. Inappropriate fire regimes, such as fires that burn either too hot or not hot enough or at unsuitable frequencies for a given community can be detrimental to some native plant and animal species and vegetation communities.

4.   **Economic and Social function -** recovery after bushfire disaster is a long term process. Natural disasters can have social costs on communities in terms of mental and physical health and well-being as well as education, employment and community networks. These impacts can ultimately lead to a disruption in economic or social development.

Guiding principles

This Bushfire Risk Reduction Strategy, (in line with the National Bushfire Management Policy Statement for Forests and Rangelands) places priority on the protection of life, as well as the need for due consideration of the important responsibility of governments to address the purpose for which they set aside the bushland that surrounds many urban areas. The purpose being that all Australians, now and in future, should benefit from the roles of these lands in conserving biodiversity, heritage and carbon, producing water and timber, and hosting recreation and tourism opportunities.

The strategy has been developed in alignment with the aims of the *Tasmanian State Bushfire Safety Policy* which are to:

- Recognise that responsibility for mitigating bushfire risk together with enhancing community safety during bushfires is shared by the State, local governments, emergency and land management agencies, individuals, household members and the broader community;
- increase community knowledge of and preparedness for bushfire risk, thereby informing the development of action plans to address such risk;
- support and improve local bushfire safety planning that tailors management of risk to the needs of the individual community; and
- ensure a safe response to bushfires by households and individuals in identifying bushfire safety options to maximise the likelihood of survival.

Our strategy is based on the following principles:

- Bushfires are an inevitable feature of the Australian landscape. Like other natural hazards, bushfires cannot be totally prevented;
- The risk from bushfires is already significant and is increasing under the influence of climate change which is lengthening both fire season and severity;
- The risk from bushfires can in some instances be mitigated or reduced;
- Bushfire reduction and management is a shared responsibility between the community, industries, land and bushfire management agencies and all levels of government;
- The protection of human life must always be the highest consideration for bushfire risk reduction and management decision making;
- Fire is an important ecosystem process that is required for the ecologically sustainable management of some vegetation communities and species. Planned burning at periodic intervals appropriate to fire dependent vegetation community types is important to maintain native plant diversity;
- Open spaces/natural areas provide an important role in the community contributing to environmental, economic and social well-being. Appropriate fire management of the natural area reserves network and open spaces is necessary to ensure the ongoing contribution of these areas for future generations; and

5. Performance against fire management principles and the effectiveness of strategies over longer time frames must be monitored regularly and reviewed in order to continually improve performance and bring about change.

How great is the risk from bushfire?

It is vital that we understand the risk bushfire poses in LGA so that best practice future planning and reduction efforts are put in place to reduce the risk of bushfire (on Council owned land) and to potentially prevent the loss to life and property.

Bushfire risk is made up of two parts: *Likelihood* (how likely a bushfire is in a given area) and *Consequence* (what impact a fire in a specific location would have on communities and the environment).

According to the 2016 Tasmanian State Disaster Risk Assessment, "Bushfire remains the greatest aggregated risk to Tasmania. It is a 'High' or 'Extreme' risk across all sectors of society, often with catastrophic consequences expected every 30 years". The likelihood of a bushfire disaster is expected to increase as climate change brings with it an increase in both the number of fire danger days and overall fire danger.

More than 90% of municipality is mapped as being 'bushfire-prone'* in the draft bushfire-prone areas overlay of the Interim Planning Scheme for Kingborough. The majority of the Kingborough municipality has not been subject to a significant bushfire event since the devastating 1967 Black Tuesday bushfires more than 50 years ago. With the majority of vegetation fuel loads in the municipality now trending towards maximum potential or steady state fuel load, the likelihood of a major bushfire event in the municipality is now greater than ever.

* A **'bushfire-prone area'** for the purposes of Tasmanian planning and building legislation includes:

1. Land that is within the boundary of a bushfire-prone area shown on an overlay on a planning scheme map; or

2. Where there is no overlay on a planning scheme map, land that is within 100m of an area of bushfire-prone vegetation equal to or greater than 1 hectare.

Our focus

Building an engaged and bushfire resilient community

Minimising the risk to human life, assets and the environment from bushfire

Reducing bushfire risk to the community from Council owned or managed land

Maintaining a balance in ecological integrity and values of natural areas

Efficient use of resources

Minimising the risk and legal liability to Council from bushfire through the use of best practice techniques

Our objectives

This Strategy has been developed in order to assist and guide Council in reaching its organisational goals and objectives in relation to bushfire risk reduction and fuel management on Council owned and managed land.

Kingborough Council's primary bushfire risk reduction objectives are to:

- protect human life, property and community assets from the adverse impacts of fire;
- develop and implement cooperative and coordinated fire management arrangements with fire authorities, other Councils, reserve neighbours and the community;
- manage fire regimes within reserves to protect and conserve cultural heritage and recreational values, and maintain flora and fauna species diversity and composition.

Our 5 Key outcomes

1) The allocation of Council resources towards bushfire risk reduction is effective, strategic in approach and prioritised on the basis of risk;
2) Risk from bushfire on Council owned and managed land to community and critical assets is reduced;
3) The legal and pecuniary liability to Council from bushfire risk on its own land is reduced;
4) Biodiversity is maintained and ecological resilience is enhanced; and
5) Community bushfire preparedness and resilience building continues to grow as Council works in conjunction with the Tasmania Fire Service to establish a culture of bushfire risk awareness in the Kingborough community.

Our performance indicators

- Risk management actions undertaken in accordance with Council's Risk Register;
- Actions have been incorporated into Council's Strategic Delivery Plan and reported in the Annual Report;
- Regulatory compliance – (Council's obligations under the Fire Service Act, Local Government Act and common law are met);
- Delivery of priority actions identified in the Bushfire Risk Reduction Delivery Plan;
- Reserves assessed as being within the top ten highest in terms of bushfire risk in the municipality have reserve fire management plans prepared for them; and;
- Increased capacity and knowledge of Council staff in relation to bushfire risk reduction through training.

The road to achieving our outcomes

Focus Area 1: Minimising risk to human life, assets and environment

Over the life of this Strategy Council will:

- Prepare detailed Reserve Fire Management Plans for each of its highest bushfire risk bushland reserves;
- Continue to undertake bushfire hazard reduction work on its own land including maintenance of fuel breaks, fire trails, hazard management areas and roadside verges where appropriate in order to reduce the risk to human life and critical assets in the vicinity of Council owned land;
- Continue to conduct an annual fire hazard abatement program and issue Fire Abatement notices as necessary; and
- Participate in the statewide tenure blind fuel reduction burning program in conjunction with the Tasmania Fire Service where appropriate.

Focus Area 2: Effective allocation of Council's Resources

Council acknowledges the need to manage bushfire risk reduction on Council owned and managed land within its limited financial resources. Bushfire risk reduction actions on Council owned or managed land are necessary to minimise risk to the community, to limit Council's potential liability and to address the concerns of the community in relation to genuine and perceived bushfire risk.

Over the life of this Strategy Council will:

- Undertake planning as well as on ground bushfire risk reduction works on Council managed lands to the limit of the allocated budget on a prioritised basis; and
- Prioritise reduction works on the basis of actual rather than perceived risk, as determined by results of the *Bushfire Risk Assessment Modelling for Kingborough Council (2018)* or other future bushfire risk assessment investigations in the Kingborough Municipality*.*

Focus Area 3: Maintenance of ecological balance (biodiversity)

Over the life of this Strategy Council will:

- Take an integrated approach to risk reduction treatments that seeks to ensure the sustainable management of Councils bushland reserves including the protection and enhancement of ecological values provided by reserves;
- Take a strategic approach to the management of bushfire risk which acknowledges the need to strike a balance between reducing bushfire risk and maintaining biodiversity values and ecological resilience.

Focus Area 4: Reduction in liability

Over the life of this Strategy Council will:

- Prepare a Bushfire Risk Reduction Plan for Council owned and managed land and implement priority actions contained in the plan;
- Take action within the limit of its resources to reduce the risk to the community and limit Council's potential liability (both financially and reputationally) from bushfire hazard on Council owned land;
- Provide for the development of staff knowledge and experience in bushfire risk and reduction treatments.

Focus Area 5: Engaged and bushfire resilient community in Kingborough

Over the life of this Strategy Council will:

- Focus on ensuring that Council's highest bushfire risk reserves have suitable access and water supply arrangements that will assist in firefighting operations;
- support the ongoing work of the TFS in preparing communities for bushfire emergencies within the municipality;
- continue to promote awareness in the community (including conducting targeted campaigns with reserve neighbours) of the bushfire risk in the municipality and the need to prepare properties and have a bushfire survival plan; and
- Encourage private property owners to maintain bushfire Hazard Management Areas (HMAs)* within their own lot as per Council's Policy on the Establishment of Hazard Management Areas on Council owned land.

*A Hazard Management Area means the area between a habitable building or building areas and an area of bushfire prone vegetation, which provides access to a fire front for firefighting, which is maintained in a minimal fuel condition and in which there are no other hazards present which significantly contribute to the spread of a bushfire (Tasmania Fire Service).

Priority Actions

The means of implementing the bushfire risk reduction strategy are outlined in detail in Council's **Bushfire Risk Reduction Delivery Plan** but can be summarised as follows:

- Bushfire fuel management: removal, reduction or modification of vegetation fuel through mechanical or prescribed burning methods;
- Strengthening the integrity of escape routes through roadside vegetation reduction works where appropriate;
- Reducing the exposure of built and other assets to bushfire attack through creation of defendable spaces or hazard management areas;
- Increasing preparedness through the provision of suitable access and water supply arrangements in Council owned or managed reserves that will assist with firefighting operations;
- Capacity building for Council staff in bushfire reduction expertise to increase preparedness and build the bushfire program within Council;
- Identifying vulnerable communities and locations ahead of bushfire events and working with TFS to ensure development of emergency response plans for those communities;
- Preparation of reserve specific fire management plans;
- Building relationships, raising awareness and changing behaviours relating to the reduction of bushfire related risks within the community and reserve neighbours; and
- Supporting the work of the Tasmania Fire Service in the ongoing education of Kingborough communities about bushfire risk.

Delivery Plan

Council is seeking to ensure the adoption of best practices in relation to bushfire reduction activities conducted on its own land. By adopting best practice we will reduce wasted effort and resources and maximise effectiveness and safety from planning to implementation.

This strategy document outlines a number of risk reduction actions and is accompanied by a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) for fire management operations on Council owned land (see **Appendix 1**).

A summary table and plan for the delivery of high, medium and low priority actions is contained in Council's **Bushfire Risk Reduction Delivery Plan**.

Over the following five years, detailed Reserve Fire Management Plans will be prepared for each of Council's highest bushfire risk reserves as the highest priority bushfire risk reduction action.

Monitoring, review and evaluation of the strategy

There is an inherent risk with all strategic plans that relevance and impetus will fade with time or, in the case of bushfire, in the event of a major fire event. Monitoring and review must be incorporated in Council's Bushfire Reduction Strategy to allow for the measurement of success and for adaptive management in response to unforseen changes or new developments in the field of fire management.

This strategy will enter a review phase if any of the following conditions occur:
- A significant bushfire event occurs within the municipality, or
- A major change is made to state or federal bushfire risk legislation or policy, or
- If Council directs a review to occur due to other reasons.

If none of the above occurs in the intervening time, a review shall commence in 2023.