

MELBOURNE BUSHFIRE PROTECTION PROGRAM

Annual Report 2009 - 2010

Summary

In July 2009, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Gavin Jennings, announced a \$21 million funding package for additional fire protection works on public land in Melbourne's urban bushland interface areas.

One year on, the Melbourne Bushfire Protection Program (MBPP) has made significant progress:

- 21 staff appointed to new positions across the metropolitan area
- \$3.95 million spent on project establishment and 2009/10 works
- 95km of works to improve existing fuelbreaks completed
- A \$400,000 contribution to the Department of Sustainability and Environment's (DSE) planned burn program, which achieved a 240% increase in area within the MBPP boundary
- \$6.2 million budgeted for an expanded program of 2010/11 works

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Minister Jennings being briefed while attending a field visit about program outcomes within Plenty Gorge Park

Program overview

The MBPP program was established in July 2009 to improve the bushfire preparedness of public land on Melbourne's outer urban fringe, and thereby safeguard nearby communities and assets.

The funding program focuses on public land across the greater Melbourne area, from Werribee to the Mornington Peninsula. This extends across the three metropolitan Melbourne *Fairer Victoria Boundaries* of North and West Metro, East Metro and Southern Metro.

A map of the MBPP area is depicted on the final page.

Key objectives of the MBPP program include:

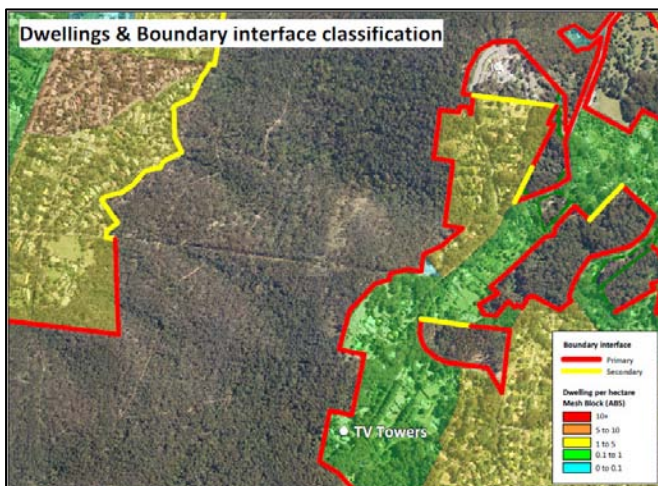
- building on existing programs of planned burning
- improving the standard and quality of the fuelbreak network
- enhancing the existing bushfire response capability with additional fire fighting resources
- building on existing community bushfire education and engagement programs

Budget and program establishment

The first year budget of \$3.95 million was fully expended on program establishment and 2009 / 10 works.

Program establishment included:

- Appointing 21 new staff, including 10 program staff based at Glen Waverley and 11 field-based operational officers
- Purchase of eight new slip-on fire fighting vehicles, a tractor, slasher and chipper
- New office location established at Glen Waverley. An additional office location established at Woodlands Historic Park in Melbourne's north-west



Asset-interface classification, Dandenong Ranges National Park

Planned burn program

A substantial increase was achieved in the DSE planned burn program across the MBPP area when compared to the 10 year average.

- 45 planned burns completed, a 55% increase
- 884ha treated, a 240% increase
- More burns in new areas such as grasslands and Melbourne Water estate
- The MBPP contributed \$400,000 to help fund this expanded program

More capacity to prepare

On top of the 11 full time and fully equipped operational officers, another 10 seasonal project fire fighters were employed early to undertake preparation works prior to the commencement of planned burns.

Fuel management zones

A risk analysis framework was applied to guide development of the rolling three year burn program. New proposed Fuel Management Zones consistent with the 2006 *Code of Practice* were identified across the MBPP area.



New slip-on unit in action during planned burning

Risk analysis

Best practice fire planning models help develop optimum risk reduction treatments. The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre's fire characterisation model (*Phoenix*) and the *House Ignition Likelihood Index* are used to measure bushfire risk and ultimately assess how effective risk reduction treatments are across the landscape.

Parks were assessed using the ACT's *Asset Interface Classification System*. This considers the likely direction and length of run of a fire to help determine location, width and effectiveness of fuelbreaks.

Plenty Gorge Fuel Hazard Assessment

Fuel hazard assessment in Plenty Gorge Park consisted of 276 plots across 32 transects. 90% of these contained a low to moderate fuel hazard. This helps prioritise areas for treatment. In future the same process will be undertaken in other park areas.



Planned burning within grasslands

Fire in the environment planning

A fire ecology assessment has been developed for the Mornington Peninsula. The assessment provides guidance for using fire as a management tool across all land tenures to achieve ecological objectives. Work has commenced on a similar assessment for the Dandenong Ranges National Park and Warrandyte State Park.

Improving the network of fuelbreaks

95km of works to improve the network of existing fuelbreaks were complete in the program's first year.

- The total cost of these works was just over \$1 million
- Flora, fauna and cultural heritage checks were undertaken prior to works commencing

In addition, an annual slashing maintenance program is undertaken across the 550km of existing fuelbreaks.

Mapping the fuelbreak and vehicular track network

915km of the existing fuelbreak, road and tracks were mapped to improve spatial data.

Staff working with remote data collectors were able to GPS the network whilst also identifying locations of track infrastructure (e.g. culverts) and the road condition.



Fuelbreak at One Tree Hill, within the Dandenong Ranges National Park

Engaging with community

- A multi-agency community engagement network involving Parks Victoria, DSE, CFA, MFB and Melbourne Water was established, and co-delivered numerous community meetings across the MBPP area
- 'Notice of works' flyers were distributed to neighbours prior to the commencement of fuelbreak improvement works and planned burns
- \$150,000 worth of fire preparedness signage installed
- Parks Victoria and DSE have attended over 80 fire community engagement forums within the MBPP area
- A campaign advertising preparedness works occurring across all parks within the MBPP area was run in regional papers



Looking ahead, 2010/11 Program

Budget

- \$6.2 million budgeted for second year works

Risk analysis

- Continue to investigate *Phoenix* fire modelling to measure effective risk reduction

Planned Burning

- More than 50 burns nominated, totalling over 1000 hectares
- Trial burning outside traditional seasons (e.g. winter candling) and delivery of an expanded program across urban interface parks

Improving the network of fuelbreaks

- 48km of new fuelbreaks planned, plus a further 49km of works to improve existing fuelbreaks
- Full ecological and cultural assessments of new works for legislative approvals (e.g. *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*)
- Improved contract standards and process for all slashing and new fuelbreak works
- Trialling alternate ways to treat waste material (e.g. community firewood)

Engaging with community

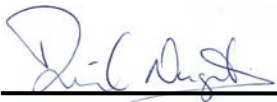
- \$200,000 budgeted for access to fire preparedness information via Parks Victoria's new website
- Social research project within the MBPP area

Project Control

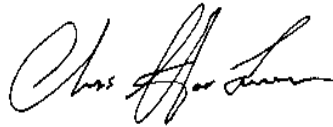
A Project Plan which sets out key outcomes, budgetary allocations and governance arrangements over the four year program period was approved by Parks Victoria Chief Executive Mark Stone and DSE Secretary Greg Wilson.

The Project Control Group comprising representatives from DSE, Country Fire Authority, Metropolitan Fire Service, Melbourne Water, Municipal Association of Victoria and chaired by Parks Victoria has convened and provided direction to the project team on eight occasions since July 2009.

This annual report is endorsed by key Parks Victoria and DSE representatives.



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