Australian Capital Territory

Emergencies (Strategic Bushfire Management) Plan 2025

Disallowable instrument DI 2025–249

made under the

Emergencies Act 2004, s 72 (Strategic Bushfire Management Plan)

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1   Name of instrument

This instrument is the *Emergencies (Strategic Bushfire Management) Plan 2025*.

2   Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after it is notified.

3   Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

I make the ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan at schedule1 to this instrument.

4   Revocation

This instrument revokes the *Emergencies (Strategic Bushfire Management) Plan 2019* DI2019-206.

Dr Marisa Paterson
Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services
8 September 2025

ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

2025-2030

2025 - 2030 · We All Have A Role In Preparing For Bushfires · Shared Responsibility ·

Cover artwork

The ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS) sought entries from creative and artistic ACT school students to design a cover for SBMP v5 that represented the theme: "Shared Responsibility – we all have a role in preparing for bushfires". The winning front cover design was created by Julia Juchnicki from Year 7 at Evelyn Scott School.

Artist statement

Using the previous winner's artwork as inspiration, I was drawn to the use of Indigenous art symbols. Living and learning on Ngunnawal country, it was important to me to incorporate it into my artwork. The three lines symbol represents fire in Aboriginal art. I used brown tones to represent the ground. I wanted to incorporate the flame as the focal point of the artwork. The bright colours of the flame make it eye catching and contrast well against the neutral tones. I wanted to have the theme of shared responsibility clear on the artwork as it is such an important statement to be made about fire safety in the ACT.

Other artists

Charlie Cooper - Year 3 Weetangera Primary School
Jiawei Wang - Year 5/6, Florey Primary School
Elle Scanes - Age 5
Son Do - Year 12, Lake Tuggeranong College

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal People, and express our appreciation for the traditional teachings of fire and the positive impact it can make to support land and country to thrive.

We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Contents

Introduction

The Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) is produced every five years and has been in place since 2004, following the tragic bushfires of summer 2003. That event was formative in the Australian Capital Territory's (ACT) history of bushfires – four Canberrans lost their lives, over 490 were injured, around 70% of the Territory's agricultural land and natural reserves were severely damaged, and more than 500 homes were destroyed and many others badly damaged.

The Australian Capital Territory is know as the 'Bush Capital' - deliberately planned to have areas of nature parks and reserves throughout all areas of the Territory. The SBMP is the overarching document that guides all levels of bushfire planning in the ACT. It provides the strategic framework for bushfire hazard assessment and risk analysis, bushfire prevention including hazard reduction, and agency and community preparation and response to bushfires. The SBMP is a requirement of the ACT Emergency Services Commissioner under the *Emergencies Act 2004* (the Act).

This is the fifth iteration of the SBMP. It acknowledges, and builds on, the bushfire protection measures and learnings already implemented since the start of the series. Many of these measures and learnings have become standard practice and business as usual activities across the ACT Government and community. Building on this foundation and mindful of the increasing demands of drivers such as climate change, version 5 aims to further improve and evolve bushfire management in the Territory through a more refined and adaptive approach.

The SBMP recognises that the ACT is a small jurisdiction surrounded by the state of New South Wales (NSW). All arrangements for bushfire management (across the spectrum of planning, preparation, response and recovery) need to be developed in concert with fire management partners for various NSW agencies.

The SBMP is first and foremost a coordination and management tool, and speaks directly to all relevant parties across the ACT Government, in particular, responsible partners in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS) and the City and Environment Directorate (CED).

More broadly, the SBMP will be important reading for all members of the ACT Government and community that carry and manage bushfire risk. Our home is prone to bushfires; managing that reality is a shared responsibility.

A small number of key assumptions have informed development of the SBMP:

> Factors such as climate change mean that the fire management environment in the ACT is becoming more complex over time, and the risks more acute. Even as we get better at the task of managing bushfires, that task is changing.

> The Canberra community expects the ACT Government to manage bushfire risk on its behalf, while balancing other considerations such as environmental conservation. All choices involve benefits and costs, and required resourcing.

> Although the ACT Government has a critical role to play in bushfire management, this is a responsibility shared with the community. We all play a key role in keeping the Territory safe and secure.

> Bushfire risk can never be reduced to nil. There will always be some element of 'residual risk' that must be managed to an appropriate level, or absorbed by the Government and community more generally.

The SBMP is separated into two main volumes – the Strategic Plan and the Implementation Plan. When referring to the SBMP both volumes are referenced recognising their interdependence. When referring to the 'SBMP', the reference is to both volumes in combination. The SBMP cascades through several conceptual layers as indicated in Figure 1. The present document deals with material in the top two-thirds of the pyramid, while the remaining items are explored in the associated Implementation Plan. The narrative moves through three parts:

> Purpose
> Structure
> Priorities

Bushfire management is a community responsibility

Photo credit: Katie Love, ACT Emergency Services Agency

Figure 1: Layers of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

Vision & mission

> To build, a resilient and adaptive ACT community and natural environment through proactive and collaborative bushfire management
> To minimise the risk and impacts of bushfires on the ACT community and natural environment

Plan goals

> To enhance safety and resilience
> To promote adaptive management

Cross-cutting drivers

> Fire and the environment
> Climate change
> Cultural imperatives
> Sustainability

Key ACT management arrangements

> Risk
> Governance

Strategic themes

1. Community resilience and preparedness
2. Bushfire risk planning and land management
3. Firefighting capability and management
4. Land use planning and development
5. Bushfire research
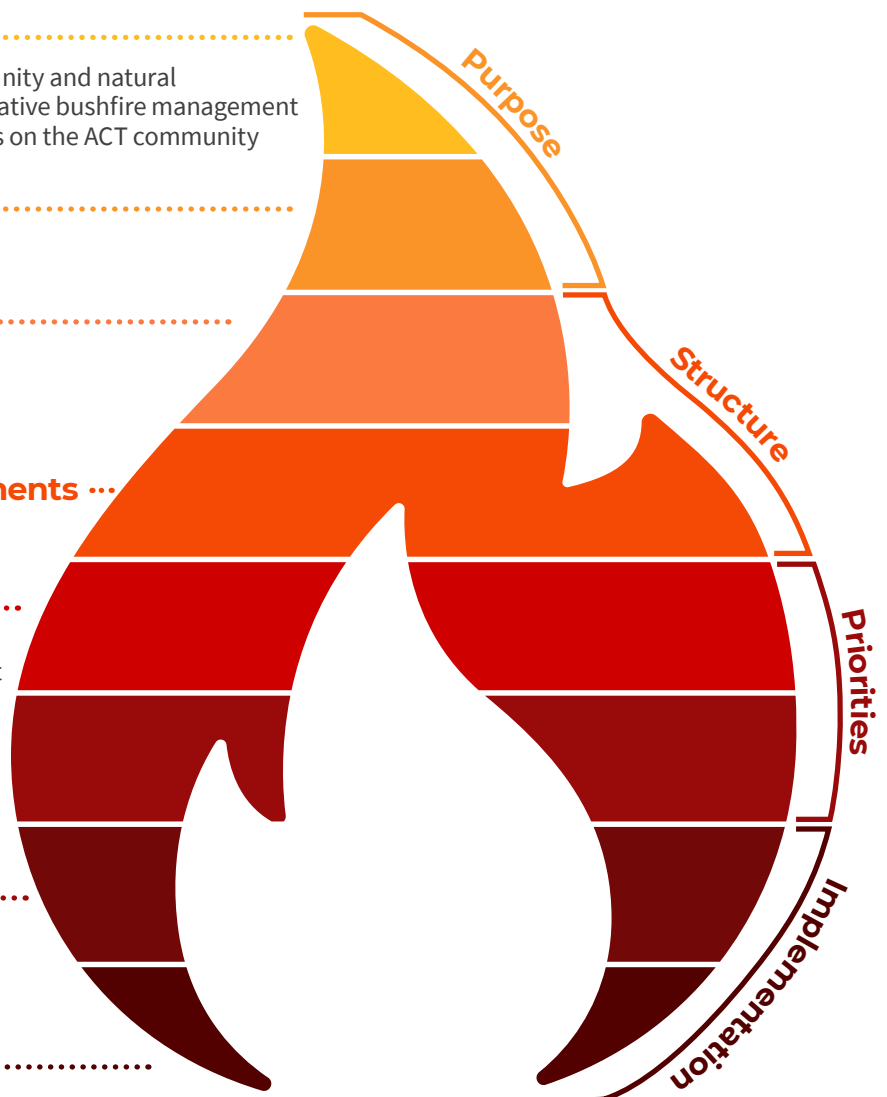6. Bushfire recovery

Plan outcomes

17 Outcomes in total
(see Implementation Plan)

Indicators of success

58 Indicators of success in total
(see Implementation Plan)

Plan actions

70 Actions in total (see Implementation Plan)

Purpose

Structure

Priorities

Implementation

Purpose

This section describes the SBMP's overarching strategic intent.

Vision and Mission

At the top of the SBMP hierarchy are the vision and mission statements. These deal, respectively, with the day-to-day and future focus of the SBMP.

The vision of the SBMP is:

> To build, a resilient and adaptive ACT community and natural environment through proactive and collaborative bushfire management.

The mission of the SBMP is:

> To minimise the risk and impacts of bushfires on the ACT community and natural environment.

These declaratory statements reflect ACT community aspirations and the strategic intent of Part 5.3 of the *Emergencies Act 2004*. They also represent the professional commitment of every ACT Government employee and volunteer working in Territory bushfire management. The remainder of this SBMP is dedicated to showing how these statements will be to formalised and embedded over the five years from 2025.

Artwork by Charlie Cooper, Year 3, Weetangera Primary School

"My artwork shows the devastation that bushfires can bring. It also depicts a water bomber plane in the background, fighting the fire. I think it is so important that we all work together to make sure we are prepared for the possibility of bushfires in the future. Everyone can be prepared and have a plan, from kids all the way to the government!"

Goals

The goals of any strategic plan refer to the plan's desired, high-level results. They are typically more concrete than vision and mission, but still aspirational – what is the change we want to see in the world? There are two overarching goals of the SBMP.

1. To enhance safety and resilience:

The SBMP aims to strengthen the safety and resilience of the ACT community and its assets (human, ecological, cultural and historic) against the impacts of bushfires.

Enhancing safety and resilience is a critical component of bushfire management in the ACT where the risk of catastrophic fire events is increased by factors such as a changing climate, rapidly growing population, and urban proximity to extensive natural fuel loads (e.g. in the Namadgi National Park).

A safe and resilient ACT is one where bushfire planning, preparation, response and recovery are predictable, methodical and fit-for-purpose, minimising bushfire harm to people, property and ecosystems. It depends on a range of passive and active measures, including community education and engagement, public communications and outreach work, infrastructure and ICT investment, survival planning, ignition reduction, risk analysis, fuel management (e.g. prescribed burning), operational capability, and support for vulnerable individuals. Above all, it requires a commitment to shared responsibility, where the ACT Government, community and individual residents work together to protect lives and livelihoods.

The safety and resilience goal has many touchpoints throughout the SBMP, but is especially apparent in *Theme 1: Community resilience and awareness.*

2. To promote adaptive management:

The SBMP will employ adaptive management practices throughout its lifecycle to ensure desired outcomes remain effective and aligned with evolving conditions and challenges.

Adaptive management is the application of 'learning by doing' to management practice. It is based on the premise that uncertainty is pervasive in many professional and technical fields, foremost emergency management, and the only way to deal with this effectively is to break down actions into a series of short-term trials and experiments, adjusting course as required.

The SBMP incorporates adaptive management to ensure continuous improvement throughout its lifecycle. A key aspect of this adaptability is the inclusion of the Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan outlines the key actions required to achieve the outcomes identified in the SBMP. As unforeseen changes arise, such as those related to climate change, unexpected fire events, or new research findings, the actions can be reviewed, updated or improved accordingly.

The process for implementing adaptive management within the SBMP, including how actions will be reviewed and adjusted over time, is further detailed in the Implementation Plan. Possible triggers for a major review of the SBMP include a significant bushfire event in the SBMP lifecycle, or a shortfall in resourcing.

Photo credit: Garry Mayo

Structure

This section of the SBMP details the high-level factors that frame and shape the bushfire management environment in the ACT.

Cross-cutting drivers

In developing the SBMP, the ACT Government is responding to four cross-cutting drivers. Some will appear obvious, others less so. These are: fire and the environment, climate change, traditional knowledge and sustainability. Together, they demand action and will prove costly to ignore.

1. Fire and the environment:

Fire plays a complex role in the environment, acting as both a natural process and a potential disruptor of ecosystems. In many landscapes, fire is essential for maintaining ecological balance, promoting the regeneration of certain plant species, and creating habitats for wildlife. For example, some native Australian plants have evolved to rely on fire to release seeds and stimulate new growth.

In the ACT, bushfires are classified as a high-consequence, high-likelihood hazard due to the region's topography, vegetation, and climate conditions *(ACT Government, Territory Wide Risk Assessment, 2017).*

When fires become too frequent, intense or poorly timed—often due to human activities and climate change—the environmental impact can be devastating. Uncontrolled bushfires can destroy habitats, threaten biodiversity, and lead to soil erosion, water pollution, and the release of large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. The SBMP recognises that the ACT Government has an obligation to manage fire for environmental and ecological values whilst balancing the risk to the ACT community.

The three factors that contribute to fire behaviour
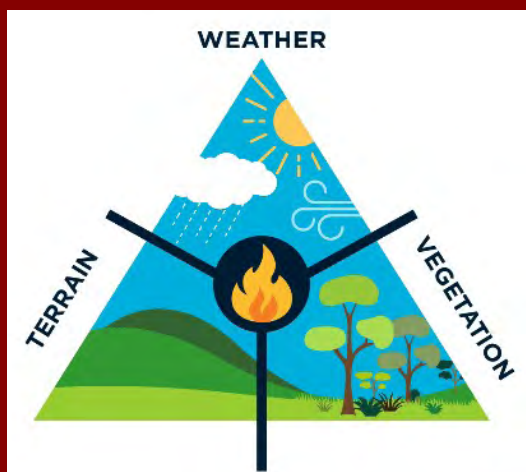
Source: *www.csiro.au/en/research/disasters/ bushfires/2019-20-bushfires-explainer*
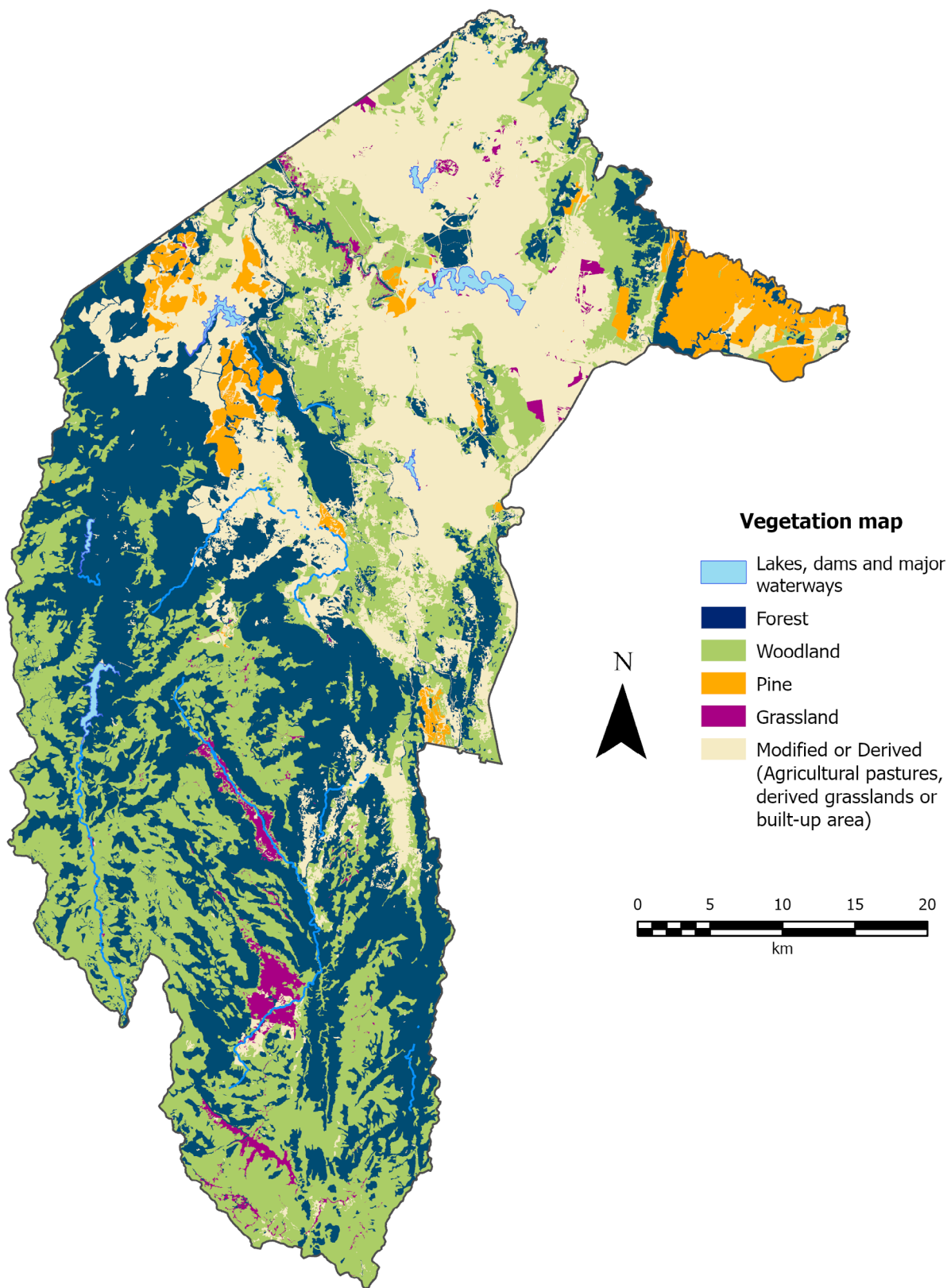
Vegetation plays a key role in bushfire behaviour, with the type and structure of vegetation influencing fire spread and intensity. Fine fuels like grasses and twigs burn quickly, enabling rapid fire spread, while heavier fuels like stumps and trees generate more heat, leading to deeper flames and longer burning times.

60% of the ACT is conservation estate, and the Territory features a diverse range of potentially flammable vegetation types including grasslands, woodlands, dry and wet forests, bogs, fens and pine forests.

Weather significantly influences bushfire risk, with key factors including temperature, wind speed, relative humidity and rainfall. High summer temperatures, often exceeding 30°C in the ACT, dry out vegetation, and increase flammability and fire intensity.

Terrain further affects bushfire behaviour, with fires moving more quickly uphill due to rising heat preheating vegetation above the fire front. Steep slopes, particularly in the Brindabella Ranges, can cause fires to intensify and spread rapidly, making suppression difficult. Unpredictable winds around ridges and valleys can lead to sudden changes in fire direction or intensity, complicating control efforts. The diverse and rugged terrain of the ACT necessitates advanced planning and fire management strategies to mitigate bushfire risk effectively.

Figure 2: ACT vegetation map (ACTmapi)

Vegetation map

- Lakes, dams and major waterways
- Forest
- Woodland
- Pine
- Grassland
- Modified or Derived (Agricultural pastures, derived grasslands or built-up area)

N

| 0 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 |

km

Source: *https://www.actmapi.act.gov.au*

Bushfires are an intrinsic part of the ACT environment. The region's flammable vegetation, hot summers, and periodic droughts regularly create conditions that are especially conducive to bushfire. Record keeping since European settlement highlights the recurring nature of bushfires in the ACT, with major events occurring in 1919–20, 1925–26, 1938–39, 1951–52, 1978–79, 1982–83, 1984–85, 2000–01, 2002–03 and 2019-20.

Bushfires are ignited by either natural or human causes. On average, 93% of all bushfires in the ACT are human caused, either by carelessness, misadvernture, mechancial influence, or arson. 70-80% of all human-caused bushfires are ignited by arson or by children playing with fire. This highlights the importance of the ACT Government, ACT Policing, and ACT Fire & Rescue's ongoing arson reduction programs, such as the Juvenile Fire Awareness Intervention Program. It also reinforces the important role that the ACT community can play in reporting suspicious behaviour, particularly on days of elevated fire danger.

Lightning ignition is the most common natural cause of bushfires but accounts for only 1-5% of all bushfires in the ACT. Bushfires caused by lightning often occur in remote, mountainous locations. As such, they may be harder to detect and access, and have historically burnt the largest areas.

Photo credit: Gary Hooker

On average, 93% of all bushfires in the ACT are human caused, either by carelessness or arson.

Figure 3: Major bushfires - 1985-2025

ACT Bushfires
1985, 2003 and 2020

N

1985	
2003	
2003 and 2020	
2020	
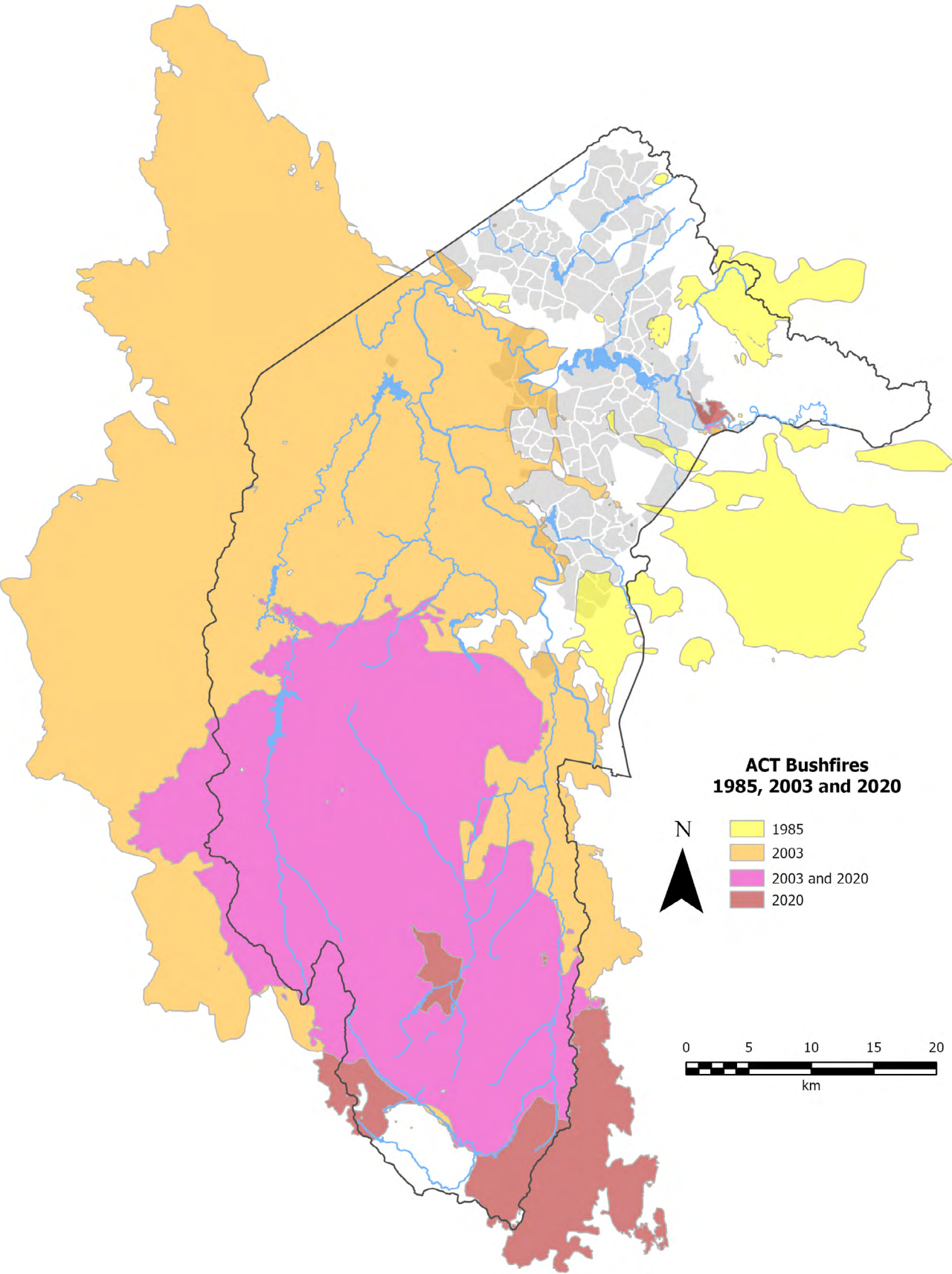
2. Climate change:

The ACT Government has acknowledged that climate change is already altering temperatures, rainfall patterns and relative humidity in the ACT, all of which directly affect fuel availability, fuel dryness, fire weather and ignition sources. Hot, dry and windy conditions – commonly referred to as fire weather – are a major fa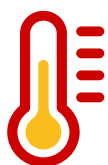ctor in increasing fire risk in forested areas. Additionally, shifts in weather patterns, such as more intense storms and erratic winds can exacerbate fire behaviour, making it harder to predict and control.

Climate change projections indicate the following effects will continue to challenge fire and land management agencies in the ACT:

Rising temperatures:

Under a high-emissions scenario (SSP3-7.0), average temperatures in the ACT are projected to rise by up to 3.7˚C by the end of the century, with hotter summers and more frequent heatwaves (DCCEEW, 2024). Figure 4 shows the historical warming to date.

Rainfall variability:

Annual rainfall is projected to decrease by up to 12.9% by 2090 and to become more erratic. Periods of drought will dry out vegetation, creating more fuel for fires (DCCEEW, 2024). Short bursts of heavy rain may also lead to rapid regrowth, followed by dry spells, increasing available fire fuel.

Longer and more intense fire seasons:

The declared fire season in the ACT typically runs from 1 October to 30 March each year. The ACT Emergency Services Commissioner has the authority to alter the beginning or end of the bushfire season if circumstances warrant (e.g. exceptionally hot, dry conditions).Climate change is forecast to extend the fire season in the ACT, starting earlier and lasting longer into the year. The traditional ACT summer fire season could stretch into spring and autumn, giving less time for fire management and recovery efforts and reducing the availability of resources, such as aircraft, that are shared with other Australian, and northern hemisphere firefighting agencies.

Increased frequency of extreme fire weather:

More frequent, extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, dry lightning and prolonged droughts are expected. These conditions increase the likelihood of catastrophic bushfires, like those experienced during the 2003 Canberra fires or the 2019-20 Black Summer fires.

Severe fire danger days that create the underlying conditions for large-scale bushfires are expected to become more common in the future for the ACT, particularly under a higher- emissions scenario. Under a high-emissions scenario the number of severe fire weather days in the ACT is predicted to increase by 1.3 days per year (DCCEEW, 2004).

Figure 4: Monthly temperature variation (degrees celcius) in the ACT 1900-2020 relative to 1951-80 baseline (Berkeley Earth)

1900   2020
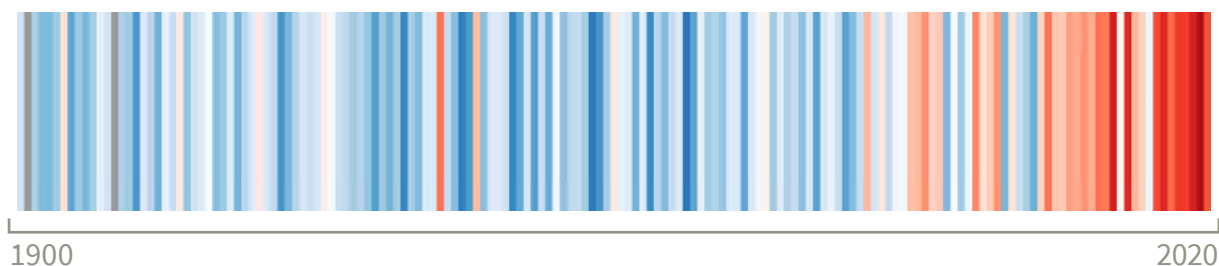
Each stripe represents the average temperature for a single year, relative to the average temperature over the period from 1951 to 1980. Shades of blue indicate cooler-than-average years, while red shows years that were hotter than average. The stark band of deep red stripes on the right-hand side of the graphic shows the rapid heating of our planet in recent decades.

Source: *https://berkeleyearth.org/temperature-location/36.17S-149.17E*

3. Traditional custodians and cultural considerations:

Cultural knowledge and practice is pivotal to land management. Traditional burning techniques, often referred to as cultural or 'cool burning,' involve the controlled application of fire to the landscape during specific seasons and under favourable conditions. These practices reduce fuel loads, protect biodiversity, and promote the regeneration of native plants while minimising the risk of intense and destructive bushfires.

Additionally, cultural burning is deeply tied to Indigenous land stewardship and spiritual connection to Country, reinforcing the importance of respecting and incorporating First Nations perspectives into modern bushfire management. By integrating this knowledge with contemporary science and technology, Australia can develop more effective and culturally inclusive approaches to reducing bushfire risk and fostering ecological resilience.

The SBMP will seek to broaden opportunities for cultural burning that extend beyond the Aboriginal Fire Management Zones that were developed in the previous version of the SBMP.

4. Sustainability:

Fire management practices need to be developed to support processes that can be sustained over time. This is done through balancing ecological, social and economic needs.

Sustainable fire practices, such as prescribed burning and integrating Indigenous land management techniques, help maintain healthy ecosystems. Socially sustainable fire practices safeguard communities and infrastructure, fostering resilience in the face of increasing bushfire risks linked to climate change. Economically, proactive fire management reduces the costs of recovery and rehabilitation following major fire events.

Ensuring the sustainability of the firefighting workforce and resources is vital to ensure we are adequately equipped to manage increasing bushfire risks. By embedding sustainability principles into fire management strategies, we can ensure that fire remains a natural and beneficial process while minimising its harmful impacts on people and the planet.

The 2019-2024 SBMP saw the creation of the Aboriginal Fire Management Zone (AFMZ) within the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. This zone was developed to encourage cultural burning and other cultural activities to support traditional use by the local Indigenous community. Cultural burning practices continue to be facilitated and supported beyond the AFMZ and are recognised as an important component of fire and land management in the ACT.

Key ACT management arrangements

A range of programs are in place to address all aspects of bushfire management in the ACT, guided by the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR) framework and coordinated across agencies such as the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT Fire & Rescue and the Parks and Conservation Service. Appropriate risk management and governance are at the heart of these measures and are a critical part of version 5 of the SBMP. The SBMP is intended to complement and integrate with Strategic Planning across all ACT Government portfolios to identity and assist in the mitigation and management of consequential impacts of bushfire on the community. This includes critical consideration of the impact of Bushfire Smoke from both within the ACT and from fires further afield (Appendix C).

1. Bushfire Risk Management Areas and Zones

There are three key bushfire risk management areas and zones that are used to prioritise bushfire management in the ACT:

> **Bushfire Prone Areas (BPAs)**: BPAs are defined as areas of the ACT that have been assessed as being at high risk to life and property due to bushfires. Canberra's built-up areas that are adjacent to forest and grassland are defined as BPAs, as is the ACT's entire rural area.

> **Bushfire Abatement Zone:** Under the *Emergencies Act 2004*, the ACT Emergency Services Commissioner has declared a Bushfire Abatement Zone (BAZ). The BAZ surrounds Canberra and extends west towards the Murrumbidgee River. It has been developed to identify rural areas where specific measures are required to reduce risk to life and property in the built-up areas of Canberra from fires originating or occurring in the BAZ.

> **Strategic Bushfire Management Zones**: Fire Management Zones form an integral part of the ACT Government's approach to mitigating bushfire risk (refer to Figure 5). Fire Management Zones are the link between the SBMP and the on-ground implementation of fuel management practices and are defined by the ACT Bushfire Management Standards. Fire Management Zones are reviewed annually to ensure they are kept up to date with the growing urban edge of the ACT.

2. Risk Modelling

The ACT Government actively manages bushfire risk using residual risk modelling, which acknowledges that some level of risk will always remain despite comprehensive mitigation efforts. Residual risk reflects the understanding that no strategy can eliminate bushfire risk, even with measures such as prescribed burns, firebreaks, community education and other risk management actions.

This concept also emphasises that bushfire management is a shared responsibility, requiring diverse strategies and proactive community involvement.

Communicating Risk

Fire danger ratings are the public face of bushfire risk management and describe the potential level of danger should a bushfire start.

In September 2022, the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) was released (refer to Figure 7). The AFDRS levels are 'no rating,' 'moderate,' 'high,' 'extreme' and 'catastrophic.' The AFDRS aims to improve community safety and reduce the impacts of bushfires by:

> Improving the scientific accuracy behind fire danger predictions
> Improving the way that fire danger is communicated
> Providing national consistency and messaging
> Providing government and industry with better decision-making tools
> Reducing the costs associated with bushfire impacts

Figure 5: Fire management zones in the ACT (ACTMapi)

Strategic Bushfire Management Zones

■ (blue)	Inner Asset Protection Zone	Areas immediately adjacent to an asset requiring intensive fuel management to minimise fuel loads.
■ (orange)	Outer Asset Protection Zone	Areas typically adjoining Inner Asset Protection Zones, and often to the north and west of the asset, particularly in areas with higher risk vegetation. Fuel management is a priority in these areas.
■ (green)	Strategic Firefighting Advantage Zone	These are strategically located corridors of land, located and managed to break up major fire runs that would otherwise impact on residential areas.
■ (purple)	Aboriginal Fire Management Zone	Areas and sites of cultural significance where cultural burning and other cultural activities are encouraged to support traditional use by the local Indigenous community.
■ (yellow)	Agricultural Fire Management Zone	Areas used for rural production or agistment. Less intensive fuel management is required but should be in accordance with the agricultural uses of the land.
■ (brown)	National Land	Land that is, or is intended to be, used by or on behalf of the Commonwealth
■ (tan)	Landscape Fire Management Zone	These are ACT Government-managed lands. Prescribed burns may be used to meet ecological or water catchment requirements.

N

0   5   10   15   20
km

Source: *https://www.actmapi.act.gov.au*

3. Governance: In accordance with ACT Government reporting requirements, the governance structure for version 5 of the SBMP includes two main entities:

> **SBMP Governance Committee:** The SBMP Governance Committee will be chaired by the ACT Emergency Services Commissioner, who serves as the SBMP primary owner. The Committee will oversee all reporting, ensuring alignment with whole-of-government reporting standards. Additionally, the committee will provide guidance on SBMP priorities and approve any changes to the Implementation Plan. The responsibilities of the Governance Committee can be found in Appendix A.

> **SBMP Implementation Committee:** The Implementation Committee will be responsible for oversight of the completion of SBMP's actions, and for tracking and reporting progress against success indicators.

It will consist of designated action owners and key stakeholders, as outlined in the Implementation Plan. The responsibilities of the Implementation Committee can be found in Appendix B of the Implementation Plan. The committee will report to the SBMP Governance Committee.

Governance questions in bushfire management extend to asset management. As Australia's national capital, the ACT has many assets with national heritage, cultural and historic value, including buildings, institutions, landscapes and ecosystem services (e.g. catchments). The ACT Government maintains detailed data on such assets, including privately owned assets, for planning and response purposes. The details of these holdings may be held in confidence due to commercial and privacy concerns.

Figure 6: Proposed planning and process arrangements for this version of SBMP.

Authorised by the ACT Parliamentary Counsel—also accessible at www.legislation.act.gov.au
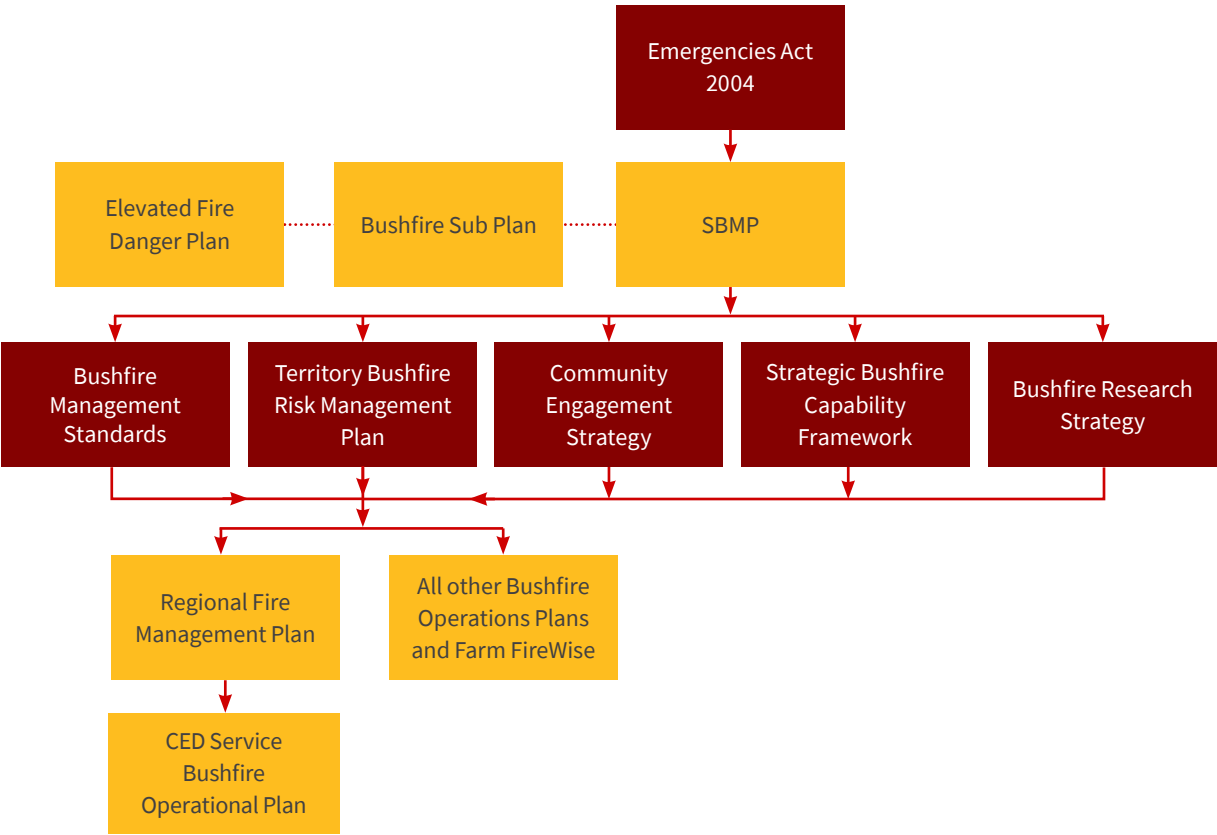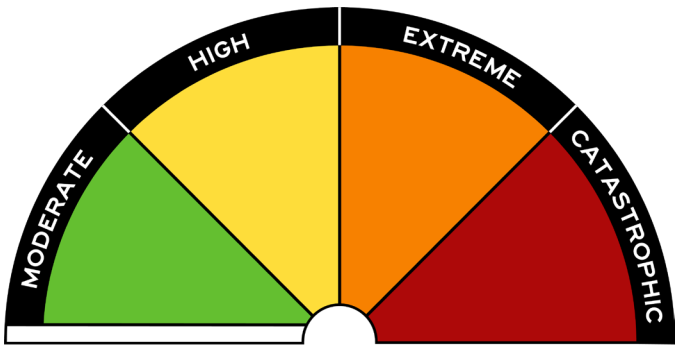
Figure 7: Australian Fire Danger Rating Levels

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) is designed to provide an indication of the consequences of a bushfire if one was to start, but not the likelihood of an ignition.

The rating levels, and calls to action are standardised across Australia.

> **No rating**
> **Moderate:** Plan and prepare.
> **High:** Be ready to act.
> **Extreme:** Take action now to protect your life and property.
> **Catastrophic:** For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas.

Figure 8: The Australian Warning System

The Australian Warning System (AWS) is a nationally consistent method of displaying warning information about bushfires with three levels of threat and corresponding calls to action:

Advice (Yellow): A bush or grass fire has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.

Watch and Act (Orange): There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.

Emergency Warning (Red): An Emergency Warning is the highest level of warning. You may be in danger and need to act immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.

Supporting planning documents

> **ACT Bushfire Management Standards (ACT BMS)** mandate the technical specifications for requirements imposed by this plan. This includes standards specifying widths for fire management zones, fuel management requirements and technical requirements for fire access roads.

> **Territory Bushfire Risk Management Plan (TBRMP)** will incorporate tenure-blind risk planning (based on fire behaviour modelling and residual risk modelling) into bushfire planning for the Territory and surrounds. The outputs of the TBRMP will identify essential hazard reduction activities across the ACT. This is an outcome of SBMP V5 and will be implemented over the life of the plan.

> **Community Engagement Strategy** is the new approach for how the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ACTESA) engages with the community to build resilience through identification of priority groups and areas to support a tailored approach, collaborative action, shared capacity building, and the development of strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect.

> **Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework** is the ACT Governments principal policy, designed to mitigate the risk of bushfire. It is used to assess the level of resources on-hand and/or required in the ACT to respond to a set level of bushfire risk.

> **Bushfire Research Strategy** will set the priorities for bushfire research including but not limited to cultural burn practices, fire and the environment, risk mitigation operations, technology and community resilience.

> **Regional Fire Management Plan (RFMP)** the link between the SBMP and more detailed Bushfire Operations Plans (BOPs) for the City and Environment Directorate estate. The RFMP also considers residual risk to vulnerable communities in the surrounding areas of NSW.

> **Bushfire Operational Plans (BOPs)** BOPs detail the specific type, location and timing of fuel management, access and infrastructure activities proposed to be undertaken by a landholder. The *Emergencies Act 2004* mandates that all unleased territory land or land occupied by the Territory requires a BOP. It also states that BOPs may be required for other land in the BAZ if this plan mandates that a BOP be prepared. Under this plan, all landholders within the BAZ must prepare a BOP for that land. Utility providers managing land or assets located within the bushfire abatement zone must also prepare a BOP. BOPs are also prepared by rural landholders through the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS) supported Farm FireWise program.

> **Farm FireWise** is a free program to aid rural landholders to prepare their bushfire operational plan and to provide education on how to protect properties and assets from bushfire.

Fire Access

Government and private land managers are responsible for maintenance, upgrades and construction of infrastructure including access trails and helipads to provide for rapid response to bushfire and to undertake fuel reduction activities. Maintenance of infrastructure and associated asset protection zoning is a required activity of the BOPs.

Through Farm FireWise, the ACTRFS assists landholders to identify strategic fire management access on rural land. The ACTESA may provide resources to assist in the planning and implementation of fire management access networks.

Photo credit: Simon May ACT Rural Fire Service

Priorities

This section of the SBMP deals with prioritisation and strategic choice.

The SBMP is composed of six key strategic themes, with each tied to a series of outcomes, indicators of success and ultimately actions. The present section reviews the strategic themes and outcomes in succession, while the Implementation Plan corresponds these items to the proposed indicators of success and actions.

The strategic themes include promoting, building, supporting or leading:

> Community resilience and preparedness
> Firefighting capability and management
> Bushfire risk planning and land management
> Land use development planning
> Bushfire research
> Bushfire recovery.

1. Community resilience and preparedness

Building resilience and preparedness requires an understanding of the diverse needs of our community to ensure everyone is prepared to manage bushfire risks. Together, we must foster a sense of shared responsibility to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from bushfires.

Strategic planning for community engagement requires an analysis of community strengths and barriers, aiming to improve equity by prioritising those with the greatest needs.

The *ACT Disaster Resilience Strategy 2024-2030* defines disaster resilience in the ACT. Therefore, work under the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan should align closely to the existing framework.

In pursuing this strategic theme, we aim to achieve the following three outcomes:

> **Outcome 1:** The foundations and systems of community disaster engagement reduce community bushfire risk, meet community needs, and are informed by expertise and best-practice approaches.
> **Outcome 2:** The ACT community are informed about bushfire risk and are better prepared, through the support and guidance of the ACT Government.
> **Outcome 3:** Through awareness of shared responsibility, the ACT community works together with defined priority audiences to build disaster resilience.

2. Firefighting management and capability

Successful incident management is achieved when the right resources are applied in the right place, at the right time. Through the current objective, we aim to ensure this alignment is reproduced across the ACT when the need arises (for our firefighters, incident management personnel, support staff, and as regards both mobile and fixed equipment). We aim to prepare for the challenges we may face over the life of this and future plans.

To further develop these essential resources, we must prioritise continuous improvement in our fire management and fire suppression strategies. This includes adopting the most effective and sustainable methods to protect our firefighters, communities, and the environment from the physical and mental challenges posed by the impacts of fire.

In pursuing this strategic theme, we aim to achieve the following three outcomes:

> **Outcome 4:** The future ACT firefighting workforce and resources are integrated and work together to meet future needs of the Territory.
> **Outcome 5:** The ACT's bushfire workforce capability is enhanced through recognising and appropriately implementing innovation, research, and learning and development programs.
> **Outcome 6:** Actions are taken to mitigate the physical and mental impacts of fire events on the firefighter workforce.

Further information on the ACT's firefighting capabilities can viewed in the ACT Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework document.

Figure 9: ACT firefighting Capability
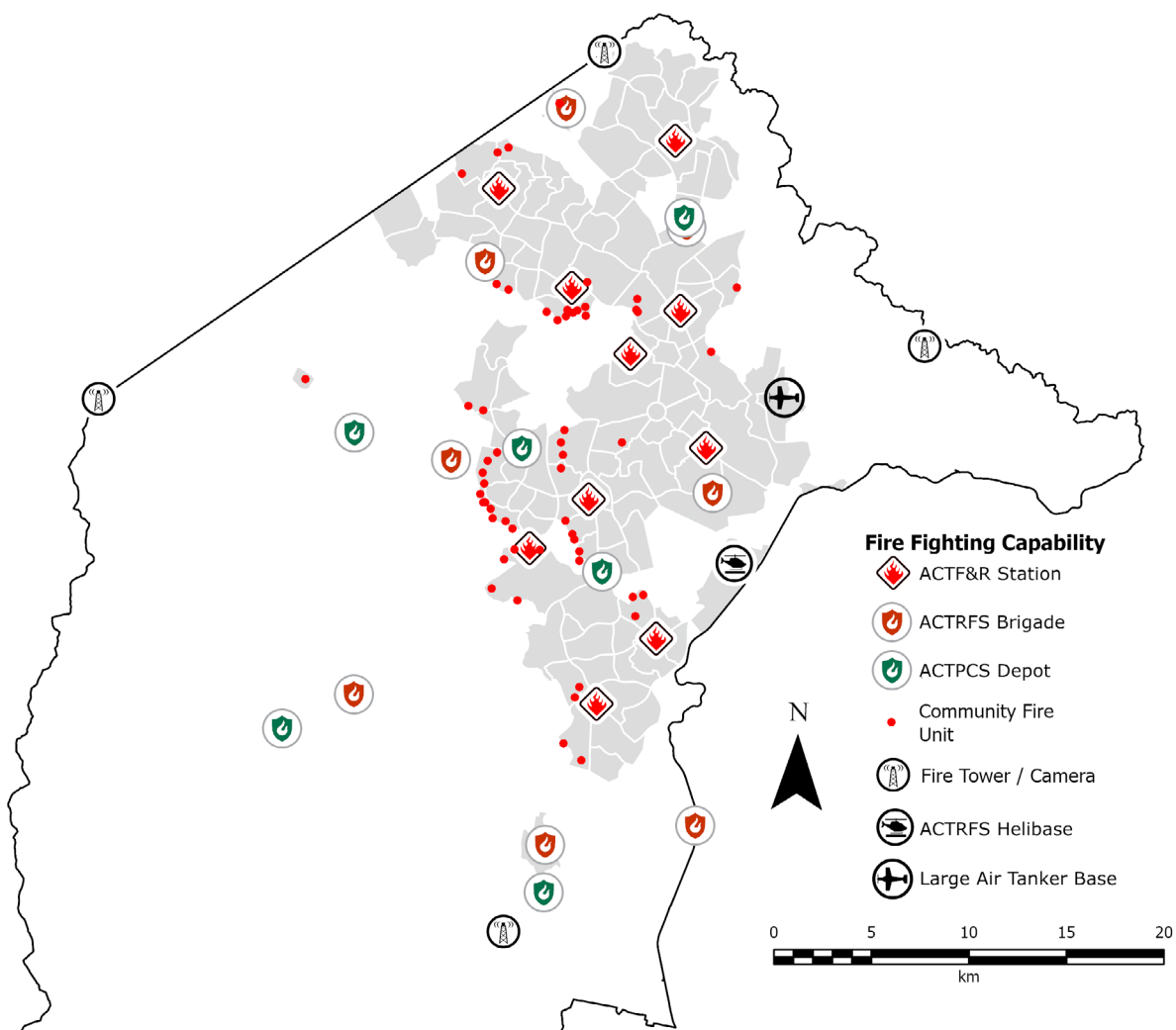
3. Bushfire risk planning and land management

A sound understanding of bushfire risk enables the development of strong and coordinated mitigation strategies. Bushfire risk in the ACT will be considered from a regional and landscape context. Bushfire risk planning and management develops and describes the strategies that the ACT will invest in to reduce the potential impact of bushfires on lives, property, ecological, environmental, cultural and social assets. These strategies include essential hazard reduction activities as one tool to maintain and manage residual risk.

Sound planning and management provides a common understanding of how the ACT is reducing bushfire risk. This will clarify who is responsible for delivery of the strategies and ensure that risk modeling informs adaptive management and continuous improvement.

The ACT will remain active in maintaining best practice, utilising technological and research innovations and applying lessons learned to ensure bushfire risk to the ACT is managed effectively.

In pursuing this strategic theme, we aim to achieve the following four outcomes:

> **Outcome 7**: Risk management is informed by a range of intelligence that underpins bushfire planning/mitigation activities.
> **Outcome 8**: Bushfire mitigation actions and infrastructure are effective and responsive to risk context.

> **Outcome 9:** The ACT Government recognises the importance of and facilitates the use of fire as a tool in land management under a changing climate.
> **Outcome 10:** Fire agencies and land managers have the tools and capability to effectively understand and communicate bushfire risk under a changing climate.

Artwork by Jiawei Wang - Year 5/6, Florey Primary School

4. Land-use and development planning

Contemporary science, best practice and lessons learnt over time all confirm that land use and development planning for bushfire is a critical input to community resilience.

One of the principle aims of the ACT Planning Strategy (2018) is to reduce vulnerability to natural hazard events and to adapt to climate change. The strategy recognises the importance of integration of emergency management considerations into strategic land use planning.

In a bushfire context, appropriate land use and development planning will ensure that future land releases are appropriately designed and constructed to minimise the risk to life and property from the impacts of bushfire. The ACT will embed

best practice into strategic planning to address natural hazard risk. The *ACT Bushfire Management Standards* is a key tool in this endeavour.

In pursuing this strategic theme, we aim to achieve the following two outcomes:

> **Outcome 11:** Strategic engagement across government, industry and community groups is established to make developments resilient to natural hazards, with specific focus on bushfire risk.
> **Outcome 12:** ACT urban and environmental policy and legislation are aligned to deliver development outcomes that are consistent with the *ACT Bushfire Management Standards*.

5. Bushfire research

Bushfire research and research utilisation are crucial for understanding and mitigating the impacts of bushfires and prescribed fire on environment, communities and economies. As climate change intensifies the frequency and severity of bushfires, it is critical to develop and apply scientific knowledge to improve prevention, preparedness, response and recovery strategies.

Research in this field encompasses collaboration between national and international sources. Effective utilisation of this research helps inform policy decisions, improve fire management practices, influence capability improvement and support community resilience.

In pursuing this strategic theme, we aim to achieve the following two outcomes:

> **Outcome 13:** ACTESA and CED have clear direction for bushfire management research.
> **Outcome 14**: Research is translated for use in fire management in the ACT.

Photo credit:
Matthew Connelly,
Watch Towers

6. Bushfire recovery

Bushfire recovery is a critical process following devastating bushfires that cause significant damage to the community, environment, infrastructure, the economy and our cultural and historical assets. Reducing the effect of bushfire impacts, as well as increasing the community's ability to function at an effective level after impact, remains a critical focus in a changing climate.

Recovery from bushfires will require collective effort, commitment and support through application of national and territory governance arrangements and better understanding before, during and after bushfires. Strategies and activities that contribute to speeding up the process of recovery for people, infrastructure, the environment and our economy have wider benefits beyond bushfire emergencies.
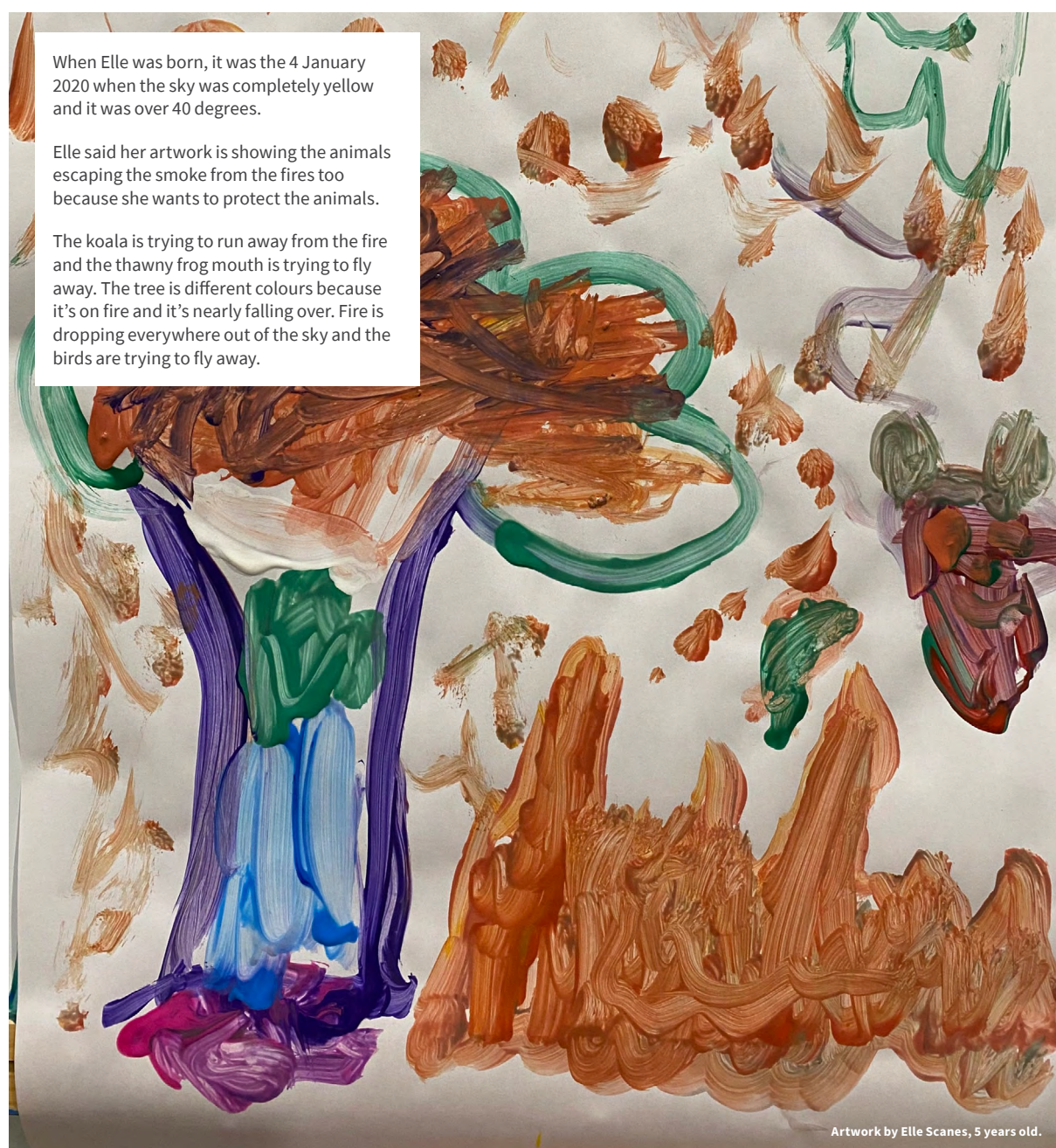
In pursuing this strategic theme, we aim to achieve the following three outcomes:

> **Outcome 15:** Recovery pathways and targets are clearly outlined and support building back better to reduce future risk exposure.
> **Outcome 16:** Governance and policy systems across government support commitment to long term and complex recovery timeframes.
> **Outcome 17:** The ACT Government has a whole-of-government approach to better understand bushfire impacts after bushfire events.

Resources required to meet plan objectives

The actions tied to each strategic theme under the SBMP have been allocated to identified action owners along with key stakeholders. The resources required to implement the actions may include resources within Directorates or be sourced from alternate sources for example Commonwealth Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, potential future rounds of the Disaster Ready Fund; and/or other grant programs. There are also opportunities to explore partnerships with research organisations, philanthropy groups, businesses, and jurisdictional and agency associations or networks such as the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council.

The SBMP Implementation Committee will undertake an annual review of resource requirements to achieve the outcomes of the SBMP. The Committee will also revise the annual action plans based on progress against each identified action in the SBMP.

When Elle was born, it was the 4 January 2020 when the sky was completely yellow and it was over 40 degrees.

Elle said her artwork is showing the animals escaping the smoke from the fires too because she wants to protect the animals.

The koala is trying to run away from the fire and the thawny frog mouth is trying to fly away. The tree is different colours because it's on fire and it's nearly falling over. Fire is dropping everywhere out of the sky and the birds are trying to fly away.

Artwork by Elle Scanes, 5 years old.

Summary of outcomes

Objectives	Outcomes
1. Community resilience and preparedness	**Outcome 1**: The foundations and systems of community disaster engagement reduce community bushfire risk, meet community needs, and are informed by expertise and best-practice approaches. **Outcome 2:** The ACT community are informed about bushfire risk and are better prepared, through the support and guidance of the ACT Government. **Outcome 3**: Through awareness of shared responsibility, the ACT community works together with defined priority audiences to build disaster resilience.
2. Firefighting management and capability	**Outcome 4:** The future ACT firefighting workforce and resources are integrated and work together to meet future needs of the Territory. **Outcome 5:** The ACT's bushfire workforce capability is enhanced through recognising and appropriately implementing innovation, research, and learning and development programs. **Outcome 6:** Actions are taken to mitigate the physical and mental impacts of fire events on the firefighting workforce.
3. Bushfire risk planning and land management	**Outcome 7:** Risk management is informed by a range of intelligence that underpins bushfire planning/mitigation activities. **Outcome 8:** Bushfire mitigation actions and infrastructure are effective and responsive to risk context. **Outcome 9:** The ACT Government recognises the importance of and facilitates the use of fire as a tool in land management under a changing climate. **Outcome 10:** Fire agencies and land managers have the tools and capability to effectively understand and communicate bushfire risk under a changing climate.
4. Land-use and development planning	**Outcome 11:** Strategic engagement across government, industry and community groups is established to make developments resilient to natural hazards, with specific focus on bushfire risk. **Outcome 12:** ACT urban and environmental policy and legislation are aligned to deliver development outcomes that are consistent with the *ACT Bushfire Management Standards*.
5. Bushfire research	**Outcome 13**: ACTESA and CED have clear direction for bushfire management research. **Outcome 14:** Research is translated for use in fire management in the ACT
6. Bushfire recovery	**Outcome 15:** Recovery pathways and targets are clearly outlined and support building back better to reduce future risk exposure. **Outcome 16:** Governance and policy systems across government support commitment to long term and complex recovery timeframes. **Outcome 17:** The ACT Government has a whole-of-government approach to better understand bushfire impacts after bushfire events.

Glossary

> **ACT Bushfire Management Standards (ACT BMS):** Guidelines dictating construction and planning measures to reduce bushfire impacts, aligned with national building codes like AS3959.

> **ACT Disaster Resilience Strategy:** An overarching framework for building resilience across all disaster types in the ACT, integrating bushfire risk reduction with other hazards.

> **Adaptive Management:** A structured, iterative approach to decision-making under uncertainty, which allows for adjusting strategies and actions based on outcomes and new information.

> **AS3959:** Is an Australian construction standard that specifies the construction requirements for buildings built in bushfire-prone areas in order to improve the buildings' resistance to bushfire attack including from burning embers, radiant heat and flame contact or a combination of these.

> **Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC):** The peak body for fire and emergency services, which coordinates research, knowledge sharing, and strategy development across Australia and New Zealand.

> **Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS):** The updated fire danger rating system introduced in 2022 to improve fire danger predictions, communication and decision-making. Ratings include No Rating, Moderate, High, Extreme and Catastrophic.

> **Bushfire Abatement Zone (BAZ):** The interface area surrounding urban and rural zones in the ACT, managed intensively to reduce bushfire risk entering urban regions.

> **Bushfire Prone Areas (BPAs):** Designated regions identified as being at risk of bushfires, requiring specific planning and management as per the Bushfire Management Standards.

> **Build Back Better:** A recovery principle emphasising resilience-building during reconstruction to reduce future vulnerability to bushfires.

> **Bushfire Season:** The period typically spanning October to March in the ACT, characterised by heightened bushfire risk.

> **Bushfire Operation Plans (BOPs):** Strategic documents outlining operational actions and mitigation for managing bushfire risks on specific properties or landscapes.

> **Climate Change:** Ongoing shifts in temperature, precipitation and weather patterns impacting bushfire frequency, intensity and management strategies.

> **Community-Led Recovery:** A recovery approach that prioritises local decision-making and the active involvement of affected communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups.

> **Community Resilience:** The ability of the ACT community to prepare for, respond to, and recover from bushfire impacts while maintaining functionality.

> **Emergencies Act 2004:** Establishes the legislative framework for emergency planning, prevention response and recovery operations within the ACT. The *Emergencies Act 2004* defines the development of the SBMP and it's contents.

> **Essential hazard reduction:** Hazard reduction activities including prescribed burning and fuel management activities that protect life, property and the environment. These activities are identified through the Territory Wide Bushfire Risk Management Plan (TBRMP) and Fire Management Zones (FMZs).

> **Fire Danger Ratings:** Levels indicating potential fire severity and associated community actions. Ratings guide public preparedness and response.

> **Fuel Management:** The strategic reduction or alteration of vegetation to minimise bushfire intensity, spread and impact, achieved through methods like slashing, grazing and prescribed burns.

> **SBMP Governance Committee:** A high-level committee chaired by the ACT Emergency Services Commissioner to oversee the implementation and alignment of SBMP objectives with government standards.

> **SBMP Implementation Committee:** A committee tasked with executing and monitoring SBMP actions and progress against success indicators.

> **Incident Management Teams (IMTs):** Multi-agency groups tasked with overseeing responses to bushfire incidents, ensuring coordination and resource allocation.

> **Indicators of Success:** Quantifiable metrics within SBMP themes to measure progress toward desired outcomes.

> **Joint firefighting force:** The combined resources and capability of the key ACT firefighting agencies being the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Fire & Rescue (inclusive of Community Fire Units).

> **Lessons Management Program:** A system for capturing, analysing, and applying lessons identified from past fire events to improve future preparedness and response.

> **Priority Audiences:** Specific groups within the community identified for targeted engagement based on their vulnerability or capacity to contribute to resilience-building.

> **Planning, Preparation, Response and Recovery (PPRR):** A comprehensive approach ensuring bushfire management addresses all stages of risk mitigation and disaster management.

> **Prescribed Burning:** A controlled fire management practice used to reduce vegetation fuel loads and minimise bushfire risks.

> **Relative Humidity:** A weather factor influencing bushfire risk; measures moisture in the air relative to its capacity to hold water vapour at a given temperature.

> **Residual Risk:** The level of risk that remains after all mitigation measures have been implemented to reduce the likelihood and impact of bushfires. This concept acknowledges that no strategy can eliminate all risks entirely, and some risk will persist despite the use of prescribed burns, firebreaks, community education and other risk management actions.

> **Risk Planning:** The process of identifying and addressing factors that contribute to bushfire danger, including vegetation, weather and terrain.

> **SBMP (Strategic Bushfire Management Plan):** A high-level framework guiding bushfire planning, management, and mitigation strategies in the ACT, developed under the *Emergencies Act 2004*.

> **The Security and Emergency Management Division** (**SEMD)** of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate in the ACT government. SEMD is responsible for developing and implementing strategic policy and programs related to security and emergency management

> **The Security and Emergency Management Senior Officials Group (SEMSOG)**, comprising senior executive staff across relevant directorates and agencies, to enhance emergency management capabilities across Canberra.

> **Smoke Management:** Strategies to minimise and manage the effects of bushfire and prescribed burn smoke on communities, including communication and modelling.

> **Tenure-Blind Risk Planning:** A method of bushfire risk assessment and mitigation that considers all land types equally, regardless of ownership or management.

> **Territory Wide Bushfire Risk Management Plan (TBRMP):** The new TBRMP will incorporate tenure-blind risk planning (based on fire behaviour modelling and residual risk modelling) into bushfire planning for the Territory and surrounds. The outputs of the TBRMP will identify essential hazard reduction activities across the ACT.

> **Topography:** The physical layout of the land, including slopes and ridges, which affects bushfire spread and intensity.

> **Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) Systems:** Frameworks ensuring the physical and mental safety of firefighters during bushfire mitigation and response activities.

Reference materials

ACT Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Action Plan (in process)

ACT Government, 2023-24 Bushfire Operations Plan Link

ACT Government, ACT Bushfire Management Standards Link

ACT Government, Climate Change Risk Assessment Link

ACT Government, ACT Community Resilience to Emergencies for the ACT Link

ACT Government, ACT Disaster Resilience Strategy 2024-2030 Link

ACT Government, Emergencies (Emergency Plan) 2023 Link

ACT Government, Resilient Communities Link

ACT Government, ACT Social Recovery Framework Link

ACT Government, ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-34 Link

ACT Government, ACTMapi Link

ACT Government, Building Resilience to Canberra's Changing Climate Link

ACT Government, Bushfire and Recovery Sub-Plans

ACT Government, Bushfire Management Plans Link

ACT Government, Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy Link

ACT Government, ACT Climate Change Strategy Link

ACT Government, Climate Change Strategy 2019-25 Link

ACT Government, Disaster Assistance Guidelines Link

ACT Government, District Strategies Link

ACT Government, Science Plan Link

ACT Government, First Nations Territory relations Link

ACT Government, Regional Fire Management Plan 2019-2028 Link

ACT Government, Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework

ACT Government, Territory Wide Risk Assessment 2017 Link

ACT Government, The Territory Plan Link

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Australian Building Codes Board, National Construction Code Link

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Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers Handbook Link

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Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Profiling Australia's Vulnerability Link

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Public Information and Warnings Handbook Link

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Australian Standards, AS3959 Construction of Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas

CFA Victoria, Design Guidelines and Model Requirements Renewable Energy Facilities v4 Link

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United Firefighters Union of Australia, A Better Fire and Rescue Service for the ACT Link

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Volunteering Australia, National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-33 Link

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Artwork by Son Do, Yr 12,
Lake Tuggeranong College