

Managing Fire in Australian Forests and Woodlands

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 3.2

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates actively managing fire in Australian forests and woodlands in a way that considers risk, ecological and forest management requirements, and protects life, property and other assets.

The Issue

In Australia, weather conditions occur every year during which, given sufficient fuel, bushfires can be almost impossible to contain. The potential impact of uncontrolled fires needs to be minimised through effective management. On the other hand fire also plays an important role in the maintenance of biodiversity and ecological processes, and is an essential tool for silviculture and forest management. Forest managers need to create fire management programs that address natural resource management and community protection.

Background

Fire management in forests and woodlands is primarily governed by State and Territory government legislation. Fire management planning requires systematic assessment and analysis of bushfire threat to forest and community values. Fire management programs should be based on the best available information about fire behaviour, the role of fire regimes in the environment, and the influence of fire on society.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- The AIIMS Incident Control System and inter-agency agreements to coordinate management of wildfires
- The development and use of scientifically based support systems to inform forest fire managers during strategic planning, resource allocation and operational decisions
- The development of performance indicators to provide information on the effectiveness of fire management in terms of environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The IFA recognises that:

- Fire plays an important role in the maintenance of Australian ecosystems, but uncontrolled fires pose a serious threat to life, property and forest values
- Prescribed burning is an effective tool for managing fuel accumulation, maintaining ecosystem processes and achieving silvicultural outcomes in forests and woodlands
- Comprehensive fire behaviour knowledge is key to effective fire management.

The IFA considers that:

- Management plans for forests and woodlands should recognise the role of fire and provide strategies to ensure fire regimes complement land management objectives and ecological characteristics
- Forest managers have a responsibility to minimise adverse impacts on society caused by uncontrolled forest fires, and should allocate resources to manage fire risk in an effective and safe manner
- There is a need to manage the accumulation of flammable litter and understorey fuels in areas of forest to limit the intensity and difficulty of suppressing fires
- Communication and consultation between forest managers and stakeholders is vital to successful planning and fire management activities
- Public awareness that fire is an important part of the landscape is essential
- Forest fire suppression requires active involvement by well-trained forest land managers with considerable experience in prescribed burning.