# Community Bushfire Resilience and Development Strategy

**BUSHFIRES NT**

**NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT**

# FOREWORD

Bushfires NT is a division of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS), and is legislated to administer the *Bushfires Management Act 2016* (The Act). The Act provides for the protection of life, property and the environment through the mitigation, management and suppression of bushfires in the Northern Territory (NT).

Bushfires NT have an important role in developing community resilience amongst our network of stakeholders which include: landholders, volunteer bushfire brigades, government agencies and the general public.

Large landscape fires are experienced in the NT and range in levels of intensity. With our large geographical area and remoteness, it is important that the community partners together build a fire resilient community to manage the increasing frequency and severity of bushfires in the NT. In order to create resilience, the community needs to understand, accept and manage the risks relating to bushfires. As a community we must work together to develop a sense of shared responsibility, so that individuals understand their bushfire risks and how to prevent, prepare, respond and recover.

# CONTENTS

## Supporting frameworks

- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

- National Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2011.

- AIDR Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook 2020.

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

# OUR VISION, GOALS AND VALUES

## Our vision

To develop an informed and resilient fire management community that protects life, property, and the environment from the threat of bushfire, ensuring communities have the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from bushfires by drawing on their own strengths and resources.

## Our goals

1. Improve the community's understanding of fire management responsibilities.

2. Build community capacity to mitigate and respond to bushfire risk by distributing relevant bushfire management information.

3. Strengthen engagement with agencies and communities through partnerships to manage risk, increase engagement and support program delivery.

4. Provide up to date and current public information to allow the community to make informed decisions in preparation and response to bushfire.

## Our engagement values

**RESPECT:**
We will be professional, collaborative and respectful.

**INTEGRITY:**
We will provide impartial, timely and balanced advice on fire management.

**PARTNERSHIPS:**
We will involve whole of community to develop strong community relationships.

# Our role in resilience

Bushfires NT supports landholders in maintaining and implementing fire management strategies. Additionally, it coordinates bushfire management across the NT, collaborating with volunteer bushfire brigades. The primary focus is early fire mitigation and sustainable land management.

We are committed to engaging with the broader community to strengthen capacity and resilience in fire management through:

- Developing fire management plans for large and small properties, communities, and outstations to identify and analyse risks and determine priorities, taking into consideration the properties economic, cultural, environmental, and non-environmental values.

- Completing a coordinated, whole of community approach to bushfire management planning by supporting the patchwork of land tenures, each with differing fire management objectives, through the facilitation of community fire management planning workshops.

- Supporting volunteer bushfire brigades and stakeholders through the delivery of accredited firefighting training.

- Provision of specialist firefighting vehicles, personal protective equipment and information technology systems to support volunteer bushfire brigade's response capacity across the Territory.

## Who else is responsible?

Bushfire resilience is everyone's responsibility

# A shared responsibility

As a community, we need to establish strong relationships to encourage shared responsibility and increase self-resilience in the face of the bushfire threat. Building disaster resilience is the responsibility of all sectors within the community including individuals, businesses, the non-government sector, and all levels of government. A connected community is a strong community.

*The Northern Territory has a large geographical land mass, and the resources within are finite.*

*"Communities that develop a high level of resilience are better able to withstand a crisis event and have an enhanced ability to recover from residual impacts."*

Insurance Council of Australia 2008, Improving Community Resilience to Extreme Weather Events.

# Risks identified within regional fire management plans

Regional fire management plans, developed collaboratively by Bushfires NT and the Regional Bushfire Committees, highlight several common risks within the 5 fire management zones in the Northern Territory.

These risks include:

- **Increasing severity and frequency of fires:**

  The plans recognise the growing threat posed by bushfires and fire weather conditions, which are becoming more severe and occurring more frequently. This trend necessitates proactive measures to mitigate and manage fire risks effectively.

- **Increased fuel loads:**

  The prevalence and spread of grassy weeds, such as gamba, buffel, mission, and grader grass, contribute to higher fuel loads. These invasive grass species can escalate the intensity frequency and spread of fires, requiring focused efforts for fuel reduction and control.

- **Accumulated fuel from climatic events:**

  Successive climatic events and rainfall patterns can lead to the accumulation of fuel loads, particularly affecting the central landscapes in the NT. These accumulated fuel loads pose increased fire risks and emphasise the need for strategic fire management measures.

- **Different land management objectives:**

  The plans identify challenges arising from a lack of cooperation and collaboration between adjoining landholders who may have differing fire management objectives and property values. Addressing this issue is crucial for effective fire management across the region.

- **Limited understanding of roles and responsibilities:**

  The plans acknowledge a poor understanding among the community regarding their roles and responsibilities in relation to fire management. Enhancing public awareness and education is vital for fostering a shared responsibility and active participation in fire management efforts.

- **Reduced regional fire management capacity:**

  Rural and remote areas face the challenge of reduced regional fire management capacity due to significant turnover of stakeholders. Ensuring consistent and sustained engagement with stakeholders is essential for maintaining and enhancing fire management capabilities.

# What does a disaster resilient community look like?

A disaster resilient community according to the Natural Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011) is one where people:

🔥 Understand the risks that may affect them and their community and take action to prepare for disasters and are adaptive and flexible to respond appropriately during emergencies.

🔥 Take steps to anticipate the threat of bushfire and measures to protect themselves, their assets and their livelihoods.

🔥 Have committed the necessary resources and are capable of organising themselves before, during and after bushfires.

🔥 Work together with local leaders using their knowledge and resources to prepare for and deal with disasters using personal and community strengths.

🔥 Work in partnership with emergency services, their local authorities and other relevant organisations before, during and after bushfires.

**Community connectedness**

**Available resources**

**Resilience**

**Risk and vulnerability**

**Planning and procedures**

Source: TRI Toolkit at www.flinders.edu.au/tri.

**Common characteristics of disaster resilient communities, individuals and organisations are:**

| Characteristics of a resilient community | How to achieve individual and community level behaviour change |
|---|---|
| Ability to function well under stress | • Collaborate with the community and volunteer bushfire brigades to promote a comprehensive understanding of bushfire risks and preparedness among community members.<br>• Foster awareness within the community regarding their roles and responsibilities in effective fire management. |
| Successfully adapt to local / current circumstances | • Developing a strong understanding of the unique history, values, diversity, dynamics, strengths, priorities and needs of each community.<br>• Recognise the significance of local knowledge and empower the relationships among our volunteers, staff, and stakeholders.<br>• Promote networking opportunities among our stakeholders, fostering collaboration and information exchange. |
| Self-reliance | • Enhance local relationships and stakeholder networks to foster self-reliance within the community.<br>• Disseminate comprehensive information to enable the community to make well-informed decisions in their bushfire preparedness and response efforts.<br>• Promote a clear understanding among community members of their responsibilities in fire management to effectively minimise the risk of bushfire threats.<br>• Foster collaboration among stakeholders, encourage knowledge sharing and cooperation in the prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery phases of bushfires. |
| Social capacity | • Continue to build relationships to develop a shared responsibility within the community.<br>• Information is shared quickly in local networks during a bushfire response to allow the community to make informed decisions. |

# How can we be more resilient?

**For individuals and families**

- Understand and acknowledge the bushfire risks associated with their land.

- Mitigate hazards in and around your residence to minimise risks.

- Develop a bushfire survival plan to ensure preparedness.

- Collaborate with community members to implement and execute bushfire emergency plans.

- Provide assistance and foster collaboration with community organisations, which serve as vital resources during and after a disaster.

- Know where to find key information and how to use that information.

- Familiarise yourself with your neighbours - they are your first line of defence.

- Get involved. Engaging in volunteer activities benefits both you and your community.

- Develop a property bushfire management plan to understand and manage risk.

**Local government and community organisations**

- Gain knowledge of the specific risks present in your local area.

- Prioritise resilience as a strategic goal.

- Take the lead in promoting and advocating for bushfire resilience.

- Develop plans for business continuity to ensure the community can depend on your support during times of disruption.

- Advocate for investments in bushfire resilience initiatives.

- Assess and understand the collective capabilities and capacity of your community.

- Seek advice from Bushfires NT or NT Fire and Rescue Service when developing bushfire management plans.

- Seek solutions that provide everyday benefits in addition to addressing bushfire resilience.

- Contribute to building response and recovery skills and capacity within the community.

# ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Resilient communities must ensure that everyone in the community is aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to bushfires across the 4 pillars of disaster resilience: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. This enables communities to come together in collaborative efforts that encompass planning, mitigation, response, and recovery for the entire community.

| Stakeholder | Responsibilities |
| --- | --- |
| **Landholder (including private, public, pastoral and aboriginal)** | • Fire management is the responsibility of the landholder.<br>• The landholder is obligated to take all reasonable measures to control fires on their land and ensure the protection of their property from fire, as well as prevent fire from spreading to adjacent properties.<br>• In the event that the landholder is unable to control a fire on their land, they must immediately call emergency services (000) and notify neighbouring landholders.<br>• The landholder must establish a 4 metres firebreak and or a 15-meter gamba buffer (if applicable) along the boundaries of their land and infrastructure, particularly if located within a designated Fire Protection Zone.<br>• When conducting fire management activities, whether on land or by air, permits to burn must be obtained from the local volunteer bushfire brigade or Bushfires NT, for properties within a Fire Protection Zone or during a Declared Fire Danger Period.<br>• Landholders are required to adhere to the directions and conditions specified in the permit to burn.<br>• Landholders are strongly encouraged to minimise risks through proactive preparation, which includes the development of a comprehensive bushfire management plan and a bushfire survival plan. |
| **Volunteer bushfire brigades** | • Provide fire mitigation and firefighting services to the community, actively working towards reducing the risk and impact of bushfires.<br>• Offer a fire advisory service to the community, providing guidance and information on bushfire safety, prevention, and preparedness.<br>• Encourage and foster public awareness of dangers relating to bushfires.<br>• Respond to bushfires in collaboration with landholders, utilising available resources and coordinating efforts to effectively combat and manage fire incidents. |
| **Regional Bushfire Committee** | • Endorse a Regional Bushfire Management Plan specific to the fire management zone they represent. This plan outlines strategies and actions for effective bushfire management within the region.<br>• Provide recommendations to the Bushfires Council on measures to be implemented for mitigating, managing, and suppressing bushfires within the relevant fire management zone. |
| **Bushfires Council** | • Offer recommendations to the Minister regarding measures to be undertaken for mitigating, managing, and suppressing bushfires in the NT.<br>• Support coordination and cooperation among different agencies and organisations involved in bushfire management, fostering a unified and integrated approach to addressing bushfire risks in the NT. |

| Stakeholder | Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| **Bushfires NT** | • Coordinate bushfire management activities throughout the NT, with a primary focus on land management for mitigation purposes.<br><br>• Assist landholder in implementing and maintaining effective fire management strategies by offering advice and administering The Act.<br><br>• Conduct compliance activities to ensure landholders adherence to The Act, including providing advice, conducting inspections, and carrying out investigations.<br><br>• Respond to bushfires in collaboration with volunteer bushfire brigades and landholder, utilising available resources and support.<br><br>• Work towards enhancing community capacity and resilience in fire management by actively engaging and involving the broader community.<br><br>• Support research, development, and innovation in bushfire management to advance effective strategies and techniques.<br><br>• Provide resources, support, and training to volunteer bushfire brigades and landholder to enhance their capacity in fire management and response.<br><br>• Take responsibility for bushfire mitigation on a portion of Vacant Crown Land within the Vernon/Arafura Fire Protection Zone, based on yearly risk assessments conducted on behalf of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning, and Logistics (DIPL).<br><br>**Note: Bushfires NT does not have the resources or responsibility to respond to structure fires, road accidents, rescues, or other emergency incidents outside the scope of bushfires.** |
| **Local Government** | • Implement measures to safeguard its jurisdiction from natural and other hazards, including taking steps to mitigate the impact of such hazards.<br><br>• Install and maintain firebreaks within public areas and road corridors to create a buffer zone that helps prevent the spread of fires and protect communities and infrastructure.<br><br>• Reduce grass fuel loads within public areas and road corridors to minimise the risk of fire ignition and facilitate more effective fire management. |
| **Northern Territory Government** | • Parks and Wildlife Commission: responsible for the mitigation, public safety and management of bushfire incidents in national parks and conservation areas, implementing strategies to reduce fire risks and protect the natural environment within these areas.<br><br>• Department of Infrastructure, Planning, and Logistics: manage roadside corridors and crown land, ensuring fire management measures are in place to minimise risks and protect infrastructure and public safety.<br><br>• Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet: take the lead in coordinating the recovery phase from emergency and disaster events in the NT. This includes developing and implementing plans for post-emergency recovery, providing support to affected communities, and coordinating efforts to restore essential services and infrastructure.<br><br>**Note: These responsibilities are specific to the mentioned departments and their roles in relation to bushfire management and emergency response within the NT.** |
| **Federal Government** | • Provide additional funding and resources to areas affected by bushfires, offering support for recovery and rebuilding efforts in impacted communities.<br><br>• Oversee the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, which assesses and communicates the level of fire danger across different regions across the country.<br><br>• Subsidise aerial firefighting resources through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), which coordinates and manages the deployment of firefighting aircraft and resources during bushfire incidents.<br><br>• Manage bushfires and implement mitigation strategies in Kakadu National Park and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park through Parks Australia, ensuring the protection of these natural areas and the safety of visitors.<br><br>• Issue fire weather warnings through the Fire Weather Knowledge Centre, a division of the Bureau of Meteorology, providing timely and accurate information about dangerous weather conditions that could contribute to increased fire risk. |

# 4 pillars of disaster resilience for bushfires

These 4 pillars form a comprehensive approach to bushfire resilience, encompassing prevention, preparedness for response, effective response actions, and long-term recovery efforts.

## PREVENT

### PURPOSE

Measures to eliminate or reduce the incidence or severity of bushfires.

### STRATEGIES

Undertake fire management objectives through mitigation by obtaining a permit to burn from a local fire warden or Bushfires NT.

Ensure that properties have a 4 metre firebreak around the perimeter of their property and infrastructure.

Ensure grassy fuel loads are managed and reduced.

Join your local volunteer bushfire brigade.

## PREPARE

### PURPOSE

Measures to ensure that, should a bushfire occur communities, resources and services are capable of coping with the effects.

### STRATEGIES

Undertake property planning measures:

- Develop a property bushfire management plan.
- Complete a bushfire survival plan.

Understand the responsibilities under the The Act.

Understand the Australian Fire Danger Rating System and Australian Warning System.

Know how to stay informed.

## RESPOND

### PURPOSE

Actions taken in anticipation of, during, and immediately after a bushfire to ensure its impact is minimised.

### STRATEGIES

Report bushfires to 000 or 131 444.

Ensure you stay up to date with information to make informed decisions.

Enact a bushfire survival plan.

Understand the Australian Warning System.

## RECOVER

### PURPOSE

The coordinated process of supporting bushfire affected communities in reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing.

### STRATEGIES

Recovery is a long term endeavour that includes the whole community in activities such as providing personal services (finance, counselling, emergency accommodation), economic enhancement, restoration and reconstruction, and public health priorities.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our community engagement work incorporates the principles of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience Community Engagement Framework:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Place the community at the centre** | Effective community engagement is responsive, flexible and recognises the community as the central reference point for planning, implementing and measuring success in any engagement process.<br><br>Inclusive, respectful and ethical relationships between engagement partners and the community must guide every stage of the engagement process. |
| **Understand the context** | Effective community engagement requires partners to develop a strong understanding of the unique history, values, diversity, dynamics, strengths, priorities and needs of each community. It is also important to understand the environmental, political, or historical context that surrounds any hazard, emergency event or disaster. |
| **Recognise complexity** | Effective community engagement considers the complex and dynamic nature of hazards, disaster risk and emergency events and the diverse identities, histories, composition, circumstances, strengths and needs of communities and community members. Because of this complexity, effective community engagement to build disaster resilience is an evolving process that requires ongoing investment. |
| **Work in partnership** | Effective community engagement requires a planned and coordinated approach between the community and partners at every stage of the process. Potential issues arising from any imbalance in power, information or resources between the community and partners will be proactively managed during the process. |
| **Communicate respectfully and inclusively** | Community engagement is built on effective communication between the community and partners that recognises the diverse strengths, needs, values and priorities of both community members and partners. |
| **Recognise and build capability** | Effective community engagement recognises, supports and builds on individual, community and organisational capability and capacity to reduce disaster risk and increase resilience. |

Source: Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience Handbook 2020 (AIDR 2020)

# Forms of engagement

| Form of engagement | Bushfires NT involvement |
| --- | --- |
| **1** **Information**<br><br>Information is shared between communities and partners to increase understanding. This information is considered in subsequent decisions and actions. | • Ensuring timely, accurate and accessible information is available to the community and partners.<br><br>• Information is available in various platforms and styles to suit diverse audiences.<br><br>• Adapting the information to suit diverse audiences and their specific needs.<br><br>• Utilising a range of communication platforms to disseminate information effectively. |
| **2** **Consultation**<br><br>Consultation involves providing opportunities for opinions to be heard so that a number of perspectives influence decisions and action. | • Volunteer bushfire brigades: establishing mechanisms to actively engage and consult with volunteer bushfire brigades. Providing opportunities for them to voice their perspectives, concerns, and suggestions can ensure that their voices are heard and incorporated into decision making processes.<br><br>• Regional committees: establishing regional committees focused on bushfire management and resilience. These committees can serve as platforms for consultation, bringing together diverse stakeholders, including community members, local government representatives, landholder, Indigenous groups, and relevant agencies. The committees allow for open discussions, sharing of ideas, and collaborative decision making, ensuring a broader range of perspectives are considered.<br><br>• Bushfires Council: represents a higher level of governance and oversight, in the consultation process. The Council can serve as a forum for stakeholders to express their opinions, provide input, and influence decision-making related to bushfire management policies and strategies.<br><br>• Community planning meetings: facilitating community planning meetings that bring together stakeholders from various sectors, such as government agencies, community organisations, businesses, and residents. These meetings provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute their insights, raise concerns, and influence outcomes regarding bushfire management and resilience within their specific communities. |
| **3** **Participation and collaboration**<br><br>Participation and collaboration occurs when communities and partners work together to identify issues, develop solutions, discuss alternatives and support action. | • Diversity in the way we complete community engagement to improve community participation.<br><br>• Create opportunities for the community to participate in discussions and actions.<br><br>• Relationships are developed that encourage the community to work together to improve fire management in the NT. |
| **4** **Community-led**<br><br>The community leads the process of working with any partners to identify issues, develop solutions, discuss alternatives and support action. | • Facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise with the community to support their efforts in community-led planning and preparedness.<br><br>• Encouraging collaboration and fostering partnerships between community members, local organisations, and relevant stakeholders.<br><br>• Ensuring that the community has a meaningful role in decision making processes related to bushfire management and resilience. |
| **5** **Community empowered**<br><br>Communities understand their risks, accept responsibility and have the resources and the capacity to design and implement initiatives. | • Supporting the community with the necessary resources, skills and capabilities to determine their own fire management processes. |

# Public participation

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) uses a participation spectrum. The 5 levels of public participation are: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.

| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE | EMPOWER |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL** | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. | To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. | To place final decision making in the hands of the public. |
| **PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC** | We aim to keep our stakeholders informed through ethical practice, respectful and impartial dissemination of information. | We strive to understand community needs and expectations by respectfully listening, acknowledging their concerns and aspirations and welcoming their voice in our work. | We will respectfully encourage involvement, open conversations and recognise the vital role, experience and time of our stakeholders. | Committed to service we welcome collaboration to increase organisational capacity through continuous learning while building partnerships and long lasting relationships. | We aim to empower stakeholders through evidence-based decision making where possible stakeholder recommendations will be included in decisions. |
| **OUTPUTS** | • Government and agency websites<br>• Social media channels<br>• Digital and print publications<br>• Presentations and information sessions<br>• Media releases<br>• Cross-Departmental project sharing opportunities<br>• Digital newsletters<br>• Media – print, tv, radio and online media | • Surveys (Have Your Say)<br>• Meetings<br>• Formal and Informal discussions<br>• Workshops<br>• Roadshows<br>• Community events | • Working groups<br>• Focus groups<br>• Discussions<br>• Volunteer programs and activities<br>• Landowner programs | • Partnerships<br>• Sponsorships<br>• Grants to stakeholders<br>• Providing advice and assistance with grant and funding applications<br>• Joint Management relationships with NTFRS | • Building fire safety knowledge and capacity<br>• Develop stronger volunteer network<br>• Publishing reports or project evaluations in a timely manner |

# Key Contacts

**IN AN EMERGENCY OR TO REPORT A BUSHFIRE**

📞 **DIAL 131 444 OR 000**

🌐 **nt.gov.au/bushfires**

f **facebook.com/BushfiresNT**

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