

Recommendations to prevent damage to the Environment, State and Private Infrastructure,
Animals and Communities from Wildfires

20th February 2019

Dear Minister,

The primary cause of the severity of fires and the damage caused during the months of January and February is due to accumulated fire fuel load.

The importance of identifying this cause is extremely important as the two main factors contributing to catastrophic fire events are fuel load and weather conditions. Weather conditions are completely out of our control; however, fuel load is not and is something that can be tangibly managed.

Recommendation 1. Engage the TFS Fuel Reduction Unit to work with State and private land holders to conduct extensive, low intensity fuel reduction burns. This results in beneficial impact to the environment, allows native fauna time to escape the fire, provides protection to State and private infrastructure and assets, people and communities.

It is recommended that legislation support this result, as failure to do so will inevitably lead to more extreme damage to ecosystems, animals and people's lives.

An example of legislation preventing this occurred on our property "Split Rock" west of Liaweenee. An application was made to run a low intensity burn in conjunction with the TFS Fuel Reduction Unit 2 years ago, however was not approved due to a small patch of cider gums being within the burn off area. On the Thursday the 7th of February 2019 the central plateau fire front burnt this area with huge intensity killing all trees and animals in its path and led to the evacuation of residents of Reynolds Neck, Liaweenee and Brandum. All of which could have been prevented.

Recommendation 2. Hydro Tasmania and Tas Networks form an incident strike team which can be mobilised to protect State infrastructure and services. This unit can then engage with the TFS Fuel Reduction Unit to implement fuel reduction burns on either side of transmission lines, sub and power stations. This provides protection to essential services and acts as an extensive fire break for TFS to work from during wildfire events.

Overarching these recommendations is the economic upside of using resources at the correct time to reduce fuel. The economic benefit of implementing low intensity burns is immense if it achieves the result of reducing the incidence of wildfires during the summer months.

This is a simple solution to a major problem and I am eager to assist in forming a strategy through engagement with TFS, landholders and State representatives to create a result which contributes strongly to the protection of Tasmania from out of control wildfires.

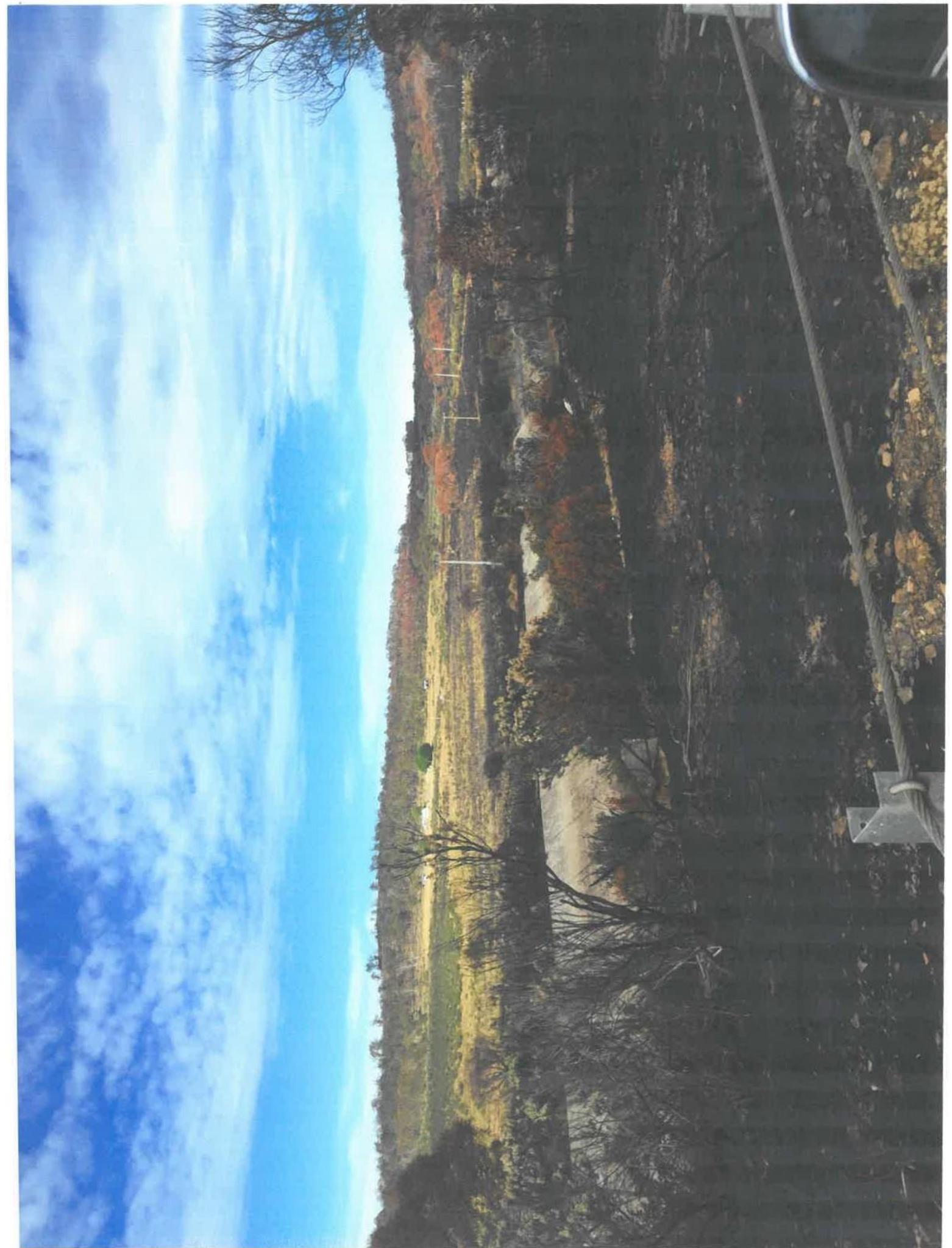
Yours Sincerely,
James Downie

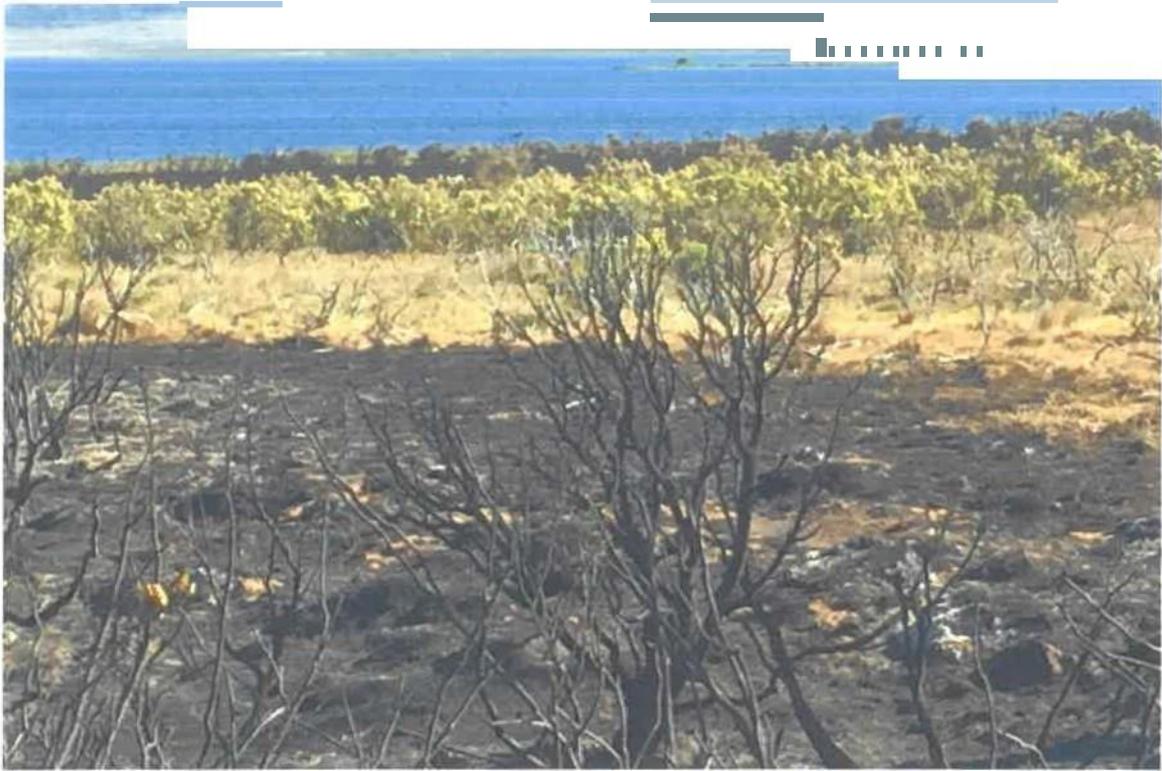
Fuel cuts the only option

I WAS a bushfire fighter and operations officer with the Tasmania Fire Service from 1972 to 2017. I worked on fires in Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and twice in America. It did not matter whether the fire was started by natural conditions or other means, they all had one thing in common: abundant fuel. Fire needs fuel, heat and oxygen. The only one we have any control over is the fuel. All of the reports, inquiries and royal commissions from the Stretton Report in 1939 say fuel reduction is the number one priority.

In today's climate unless we reduce fuel, we are setting ourselves up for disaster. The firefighting efforts of the past three weeks has shown that no matter how many resources you have, you cannot beat Mother Nature. Now is the time to start preparing for the next fire season. Tasmania has since 1967 dodged quite a few bullets through good management and luck, but it will run out eventually. Well done to the TFS and all the other agencies for their effort.

Gerald Crawford, Sorell





Fire regimes for nature conservation in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area



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Nature Conservation Report Series 15/2

Department of Primary Industries,
Parks, Water & Environment

for
the Tasmanian
Government

Many of the strategies for fire management supported in this document are already to some degree adopted by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS). They are included here to provide a complete overview of manipulating fire regimes to manage natural values, rather than to imply that the present fire management lacks understanding of such issues.

Some definitions

Numerous terms are in use to describe the relationship between fire and the components of the ecosystem in which it occurs. For clarity, the terms used in this report are defined here. It is worth noting that the terms usually refer to the biotic components of the ecosystem, but here also refer to features of the soils and geomorphology.

Table 1. Terms used in this report to describe the relationship between fire and the components of the ecosystem in which it occurs.

Term	Definition
Fire sensitive	Natural values that will be significantly damaged by any fire. In some cases, the value may survive a single fire in damaged form, but is unlikely to persist after repeated fires.
Fire tolerant	Natural values that are likely to persist in the presence of fire, however, may be eliminated if the bounds of tolerance are exceeded. E.g. <i>Eucalyptus regnans</i> may be eliminated from a site by very short fire intervals. Also known as fire resistant or fire adapted.
Fire dependent	Natural values that persist only in the presence of fire. E.g. ephemeral species that require fire for regeneration. Also known as fire adapted (Tinner et al. 2000)

Section 1. Introduction

Fire plays a fundamental role in both maintaining and changing ecosystems in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA). It is an important cultural tool for Tasmanian Aborigines, who have used it to manage and connect to the landscape. Since the arrival of Europeans in Tasmania, both the presence and absence of fire has resulted in major changes to vegetation. There are many examples of this across western Tasmania. The Savage River fires in 1982 burnt approximately 15,000 ha of rainforest (Barker 1991) and over a period of 100 years, approximately one third of King Billy pine forest has been lost to fire across Tasmania (Brown 1988). In addition, fire has caused a major loss of sub-alpine coniferous vegetation and soils on the Central Plateau, with erosion still continuing over 50 years since the main fire (Cullen 1995, Bridle et al. 2001, Storey and Comfort 2007). In contrast, inadequate fire frequency in Tasmanian montane grasslands is currently leading to loss in species diversity and reducing the extent of this community (DPIPWE unpublished data, Bowman et al. 2013).

The effect of fire on biodiversity and geodiversity depends on the fire regime (i.e. intensity, season, frequency, distribution and the type – crown, ground or peat fires). Without management intervention, summer bushfires can burn with great intensity and on a landscape scale. Such fires can extend into fire sensitive areas, and may cause damage that is effectively permanent, resulting in a landscape that contains large areas of uniform aged vegetation and lacking fire sensitive features. In contrast, planned burning increases the likelihood that summer bushfires can be restricted to fire-adapted vegetation and relatively small areas, reducing bushfire hazard and at the same time creating a mosaic of fire ages (King et al. 2006).

From a nature conservation perspective, fire management in the TWWHA should ensure that ecosystem function, approximate distributions of the major biomes and fire dependant or fire sensitive values in the TWWHA are maintained through an appropriate fire regime. The changes in burning post-European settlement have contributed to loss of both fire sensitive and fire dependant values in the TWWHA. Removing planned burning altogether from the TWWHA is an ecologically unacceptable fire management policy.

It is recognised that past Aboriginal cultural practices played a significant role in the ecology of the TWWHA and that these practices are part of the ongoing cultural values of the TWWHA. It is also recognised that changes in the TWWHA over the last 200 years, including climate change, have altered ecosystem dynamics and the risks posed by inappropriate fire regimes. The use of planned burning in natural value management has its roots in Aboriginal cultural practice but will need to respond to a new fire management paradigm, where land use, climate, landscape, management priorities and planning frameworks have all fundamentally altered (Marsden-Smedley and Kirkpatrick 2000).