

# BURNING ISSUES



## FIRE MANAGEMENT CODE OF PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

No 6. December 1995

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### MINISTER APPROVES CODE

The Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Geoff Coleman approved the Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land on 1 December 1995. The Department will commence implementation of the Code immediately. This is the culmination of just over 2 years work by the Department supported by an active Consultative Group, scientific scrutiny by CSIRO, the Fire and Biodiversity Conference held last year, and public participation.

This follows the incorporation of feedback from the Consultative Group, scientific scrutiny, formal submissions received during the public consultation phase earlier this year, and the Panel process.

### PANEL PROCESS

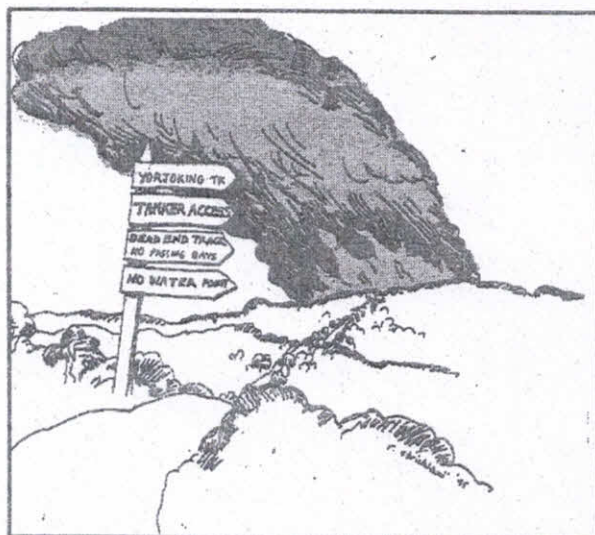
Mr Ian Ferguson, Professor of Forestry at the University of Melbourne was appointed by the Minister for Natural Resources to act as the sole-member Panel to deal with submissions which were not accommodated by changes to the Draft Code of Practice.

All submissions were forwarded to the Panel and were reviewed by it. The Panel's report states that *'With the exception of the recommendations below, I am satisfied the Draft Code responds appropriately to the changes requested in the unaccommodated submissions.'*

There were 7 responses to the invitation to appear before the Panel or to present a further submission. Three respondents appeared before the Panel, the other four provided additional written material.

The Panel made four recommendations:

1. Amend the words in the Introduction section to reflect the uncertainty associated with the extent and nature of the influence of the Aboriginal people on the pre-European fire regime;
2. Amend the section on Competence and Training to incorporate reference to competency-based course guidelines;
3. Add an explanatory comment which indicates the circumstances in which the rehabilitation of temporary fire access tracks or control lines





constructed for prescribed burning may not be rehabilitated;

4. That items for which performance indicators are appropriate be added to assist with auditing and monitoring of compliance with the Code.

The Department accepted each of these recommendations and amended the Draft Code accordingly.

## CARTOON COMMENT

A member of the Departmental Technical Reference Group, Roger Strickland, has provided a different perspective on the Code. The cartoons in this edition of *Burning Issues* were supplied by Roger as an alternative means of communication. Roger is Ranger in Charge at Lysterfield Lake Park.

## DRAFT CODE FEEDBACK

Approximately 40 submissions were received following the 8-week public comment phase for the Draft Code. Thirty of these represented organisations, the others were from individuals.

The Project Team considered all submissions and made numerous recommendations for changes to the Departmental Technical Reference Group. The Technical Reference Group discussed and endorsed most of the proposed changes.

Although many of the changes were minor, some of the more significant were:

1. Amend the first Environmental Care Principle to read-  
*.. fire regimes and fire management activities to be appropriate for maintaining the vigour and diversity in populations of species and communities of the State's indigenous flora and fauna.;*
2. Planning maps for Fire Protection Plans to include-  
*.. significant areas of housing and other private or community improvements on or adjacent to private land;*

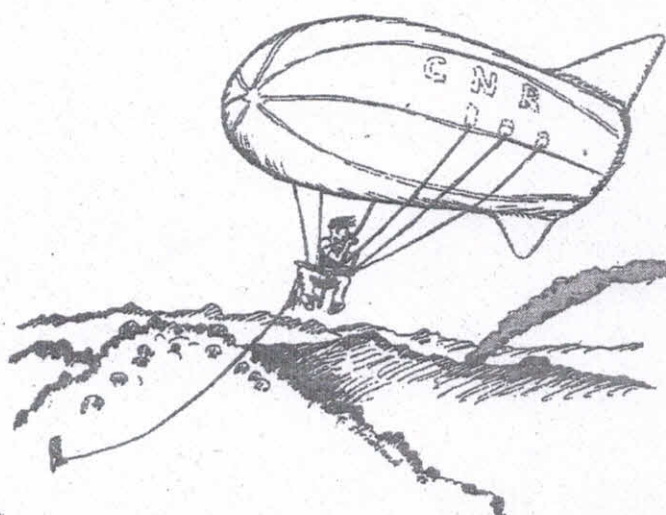
3. Research component added to the Fire Prevention section;

4. When using seedlings in revegetation works following wildfire-

*.. care must be taken to prevent the introduction of disease, insect, or plant pests";*

5. When deciding the nature and location of control lines for prescribed burning-

*existing roads, tracks, fuelbreaks and natural breaks should be used as far as practicable to minimise disturbance of soil and vegetation.*



*Do you think they've gone a bit far with this "minimising visual impact" thing?*

## IMPLEMENTATION

The Code refers specifically to its implementation, viz;

*The purpose of the Code is to promote the efficient, effective, and integrated management of fire and fire related activities on public land for the purpose of protecting human life, property, assets and environmental values from the deleterious effects of wildfire or inappropriate fire regimes, and to achieve management objectives, through the definition and application of principles, standards, procedures and prescriptions (para 11).*

*The Code lays down minimum state-wide standards for fire management on public land in Victoria. Wherever appropriate higher local standards may be established to accommodate local conditions (para 12).*



*Any plan, instruction, prescription or guideline developed for activities on public land in Victoria must be prepared to be consistent with this Code (para 13).*

Implementation will involve the revision of CNR instructions to ensure that the Code is implemented on all public land in the State. Thus the Departmental Instructions which control fire suppression and prescribed burning will be revised in line with the Code and implemented as soon as possible.

One major document which must accurately reflect the Code is the manual which guides the preparation of Fire Protection Plans. The Code requires that Fire Protection Plans be prepared for all public land. The guidelines have already been redrafted to conform with the Code and will guide the preparation of all future plans, including the periodic review of existing plans.

Further to this the Department has an on-going program of training in fire suppression and prescribed burning. This training will be important in embedding the Code principles and practices into the culture of the Department.



*I wonder what they mean "fire suppression methods must minimise environmental impact?"*

## FIRE MANAGEMENT - A REAL EXAMPLE

**The coastal heathlands of far east Gippsland have been the subject of a special study which resulted in the production of a *Fire Management Plan for Coastal Heathlands in Far East Gippsland* prepared by CNR's Liz Avis.**

Preparation of the plan was driven by a desire to manage the Ground Parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus*) which is considered rare in Victoria. The Ground Parrot is heathland dependant and Gippsland was identified as its Victorian stronghold. Given the interaction between fire and vegetation, management of the Ground Parrot ultimately translates into fire management of the heathlands.

Studies have revealed that Ground Parrots are absent from heathland less than 2 years old, (ie 2 years since burning), recolonise and breed in heaths 2-10 years old, peak in numbers in 10-15 year old heath and decline from then on until the parrot disappears from very old heath which is generally in excess of 21 years since burning.

Heathlands are important habitat for a range of other threatened fauna. These include the Smokey Mouse, **Eastern Bristlebird**, Turquoise Parrot, Masked Owl, King Quail, Martin's Toadlet and Tyler's Toadlet, Swamp Skink, Glossy Grass Skink, and the She-oak Skink.

East Gippsland is one of Victoria's most fire-prone areas with significant wildfires occurring, on average, every three years. Thus protection of human life and property from wildfire is important as well as the obvious implications for the heathlands if they were all to be burnt at this frequency.

In response to the need for fire protection, the Department has Fire Protection Plans which cover the public land in this area. In this case, the Orbest Fire Protection Plan includes the areas of heathland under discussion.

Given the diverse nature of the public land area and the scattered, patchy nature of heathlands, the



heathland patches occur in a variety of land use categories ranging from Wilderness Area, Special Protection Areas, Reference Areas, Flora Reserves, Education Areas, and State Forest. Many of these areas (excluding State Forest) fall within the Croajingolong National Park.

A significant component of the Fire Protection Plan is a strategic pattern of fuel reduction burning to assist the protection of human life, private property and public land assets. Given its strategic nature, burning zones often cross a number of different land use categories.

Depending on the purpose of these burning zones, burning may be recommended at frequencies ranging from 3-5 years between fires in high fire protection priority areas to more than 30 years in low priority areas. The potential for conflict becomes obvious!

Thus the Department's Fire Protection Planners and the Flora and Fauna Planners applied their collective expertise to find areas where both fire management and flora and fauna management objectives could be accommodated simultaneously.

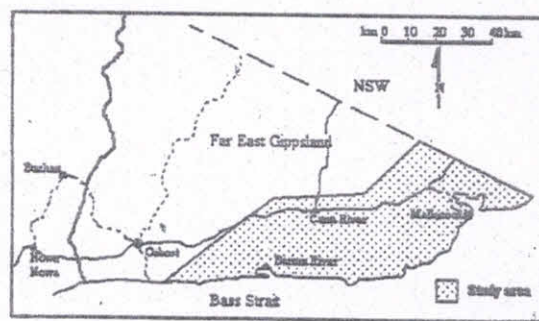
Three classes of heathland became obvious -

1. Fire Protection zones where burning for fire protection has to stay a priority,
2. Ecological Burning zones where burning for the management of flora and fauna is the priority, and
3. Planned not to be Burnt zones where protection of the vegetation itself from fire is a priority.

When the merging was completed, less than 10% of the heathland fell into the Fire Protection Zone and the remainder was able to be set aside for the specific management of flora and fauna as either zone 2 or 3 as above. (Just under 15% of the area was put into zone 3.)

This is an example of the type of *fire management planning* which the Department expects will become more common as the framework provided by the Code of Practice comes into effect. Where objectives are clearly defined and common sense prevails, many of the assumed conflicts are

removed or at least more readily addressed and a balanced outcome achieved.



## POST - FIRE REHABILITATION

Fire suppression and prescribed burning are not completed at least until appropriate rehabilitation of temporary access tracks and control lines has been completed. The Code requires that this occurs after every fire unless rehabilitation work would cause more environmental damage or the track or control line is maintained for other management purposes (eg access for monitoring activities).

The Code requires draining of control lines and tracks to meet the standard required by local prescriptions prepared in accordance with the *Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production*. This ensures a consistent approach on public land and recognises that it is often the timber industry which provides much of the machinery for firefighting, particularly for larger wildfires and regeneration burning following harvesting.

## MORE INFORMATION ?

For further information contact Max Coulter  
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Copies of the Code of Practice can be purchased from the Outdoors Information Centre, 240 Victoria Parade at a cost of \$5 each. The Centre can be contacted by telephone on 03 9412 4011.

My thanks, on behalf of the Project Team, to all who have participated in the preparation of the Code of Practice. Max Coulter, Project Officer.

**THE END**