

Annex A

Far North Coast Bush Fire Management Committee

Draft

Bush Fire Risk Management Plan

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Prepared by the Far North Coast Bush Fire Management Committee; pursuant to section 52 of the Rural Fires Act, 1997. In accordance with the Regulations to the Rural Fires Act 1997, the draft bush fire risk management plan will be exhibited for a period of not less than 42 days during which time submissions are invited from the public.

As such, members of the public, whether as private individuals or as members of community interest groups are invited to comment on the plan. Submissions should be in writing, and as detailed and specific as possible; however any comments, no matter how brief or general are welcome. All comments received will be referred to the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee with the plan for their final deliberation and approval.

Prior to finalising the plan, the Bush Fire Management Committee is required to consider the submissions to plan and prepare a review for consideration by the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee. Under the Act, the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee may approve the plan, amend the plan or reject the plan in the light of public submissions.

If significant changes are made to the plan after public exhibition, the draft plan will be placed on further exhibition prior to its final adoption.

The closing date for comments on this plan is: Friday the 4th of September 2009.

Comments should be forwarded to:

Executive Officer

Far North Coast Bush Fire Management Committee

C/- NSW Rural Fire Service

P.O. Box 816

Murwillumbah NSW 2484

Additional information or enquires on any aspect of the plan can be obtained from NSW Rural Fire Service on (02) 6672 7888. or by emailing laurence.mccoy@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

Glossary

Assets: anything valued by the community which includes houses, crops, heritage buildings and places, infrastructure, the environment, businesses, and forests, that may be at risk from bush fire.

Bush Fire: a general term used to describe fire in vegetation, includes grass fire.

Bush Fire Hazard: the potential severity of a bush fire, which is determined by fuel load, fuel arrangement and topography under a given climatic condition.

Bush Fire Risk: the chance of a bush fire igniting, spreading and causing damage to the community or the assets they value.

Bush Fire Risk Management: a systematic process that provides a range of treatments which contribute to the well being of communities and the environment, which suffer the adverse effects of wildfire/bush fire.

Bush Fire Threat: potential bush fire exposure of an asset due to the proximity and type of a hazard and the slope on which the hazard is situated.

Consequence: outcome or impact of a bush fire event.

Fire Fighting Authorities: the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Fire Brigades, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forests NSW.

Likelihood: the chance of a bush fire igniting and spreading.

Major Bush Fire: A bush fire which requires the attendance of multiple brigades, or causes damage to property or injury to one or more persons.

Display area: geographic area determined by the Bush Fire Management Committee which is used to provide a suitable area and scale for community participation and mapping display purposes.

Recovery costs: the capacity of an asset to recover from the impacts of a bush fire.

Risk Acceptance: an informed decision to accept the consequences and the likelihood of a particular risk.

Risk Analysis: a systematic process to understand the nature of and to deduce the level of risk.

Risk Assessment: the overall process of risk identification, risk analysis and risk evaluation.

Risk Identification: the process of determining what, where, when, why, and how something could happen.

Risk Treatment: the process of selection and implementation of measures to modify risk.

Vulnerability: the susceptibility of an asset to the impacts of bush fire.

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Authorisation

In accordance with Part 3 Division 4 of the Rural Fires Act 1997, this Draft Plan has been prepared by the Far North Coast Bush Fire Management Committee and has been endorsed at the BFMC meeting on <date> for submission to the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee.

Recommended

Chairperson
Far North Coast Bush Fire Management Committee

Approved

On behalf of the
NSW Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee

Amendment List

Amendment		Entered	
Number	Date	Signature	Date

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Under the Rural Fires Act 1997 the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC) must constitute a Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) for each area in the State, which is subject to the risk of bush fires. Each BFMC is required to prepare and submit to the BFCC a draft Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (BFRMP).

A BFRMP is a strategic document that identifies community assets at risk and sets out a five-year program of coordinated multi-agency treatments to reduce the risk of bush fire to the assets. Treatments may include such things as hazard reduction burning, grazing, community education, fire trail maintenance and establishing community fireguard groups.

Annual programs to implement the treatments identified in this plan will be undertaken by the relevant land managers and fire fighting authorities.

In exercising its functions under the Rural Fires Act 1997, including the preparation of a draft bush fire risk management plan, the Far North Coast BFMC is required to have regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD).

This document and the accompanying maps together form the BFRMP for the Far North Coast BFMC area.

This BFRMP has been prepared by the Far North Coast BFMC and covers both public and private lands. This BFRMP must be reviewed and updated within each successive five-year period from the constitution of the BFMC.

The BFCC recognises that climate change has the potential to increase bush fire risk. The risk assessment process applied in this BFRMP is based on current climatic conditions. The BFCC will monitor information on climate change and will modify the process when necessary.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The **aim** of this BFRMP is to minimise the risk of adverse impact of bush fires on life, property and the environment.

The **objectives** of this BFRMP are to:

- reduce the number of human-induced bush fire ignitions that cause damage to life, property and the environment;
- manage fuel to reduce the rate of spread and intensity of bush fires, while minimising environmental/ecological impacts;
- reduce the community's vulnerability to bush fires by improving its preparedness; and
- effectively contain fires with a potential to cause damage to life, property and the environment.

1.3 Description of the Far North Coast BFMC area

1.3.1 Location and land tenure

The Far North Coast BFMC area is located in the north east corner of New South Wales and includes the Local Government Areas of Ballina, Byron and Tweed.

The area covered by the Far North Coast BFMC is approximately 236 000 hectares. Major landholders include Department of Environment and Climate Change (NPWS), Local Government, Department of Lands and Private Landowners (including joint venture forestry plantations and Local Aboriginal Land Councils).

1.3.2 Climate and bush fire season

The typical / average climate in the Far North Coast BFMC area could be described as temperate to sub-tropical. Although the area can experience high rainfall, this can be very seasonal, the driest months on average being August to October and wettest in late summer and autumn (source www.weatherzone.com.au). The bush fire season generally runs from September through November although statutorily extends to March most seasons due to hot summer temperatures and strong coastal winds.

Prevailing weather conditions associated with the bush fire season in the Far North Coast BFMC area are strong north to north westerly winds, with high temperatures and low humidity. Worst seasons occur after prolonged periods of drought. The season can often start “early” in July or August if drought conditions prevail.

1.3.3 Population and demographic information

The population of the Far North Coast BFMC area is approximately 154 000 people. The major population centres are spread through out the coastal fringe as well as hinterland regional centres such as Mullumbimby and Murwillumbah. A number of villages are also spread throughout the hinterland of the three local government areas.

Many areas within the Far North Coast BFMC are popular tourist destinations. These destinations can be characterised by two patterns of development: coastal and hinterland tourist facilities.

Many of the coastal areas contain high densities of tourist facilities. These range from Caravan Parks and Camp Grounds to Five Star Resorts and include the internationally popular destination: Byron Bay. Hinterland tourist facilities are often less dense in their pattern of development and can include bed and breakfast, eco resorts or farm-stay style accommodation.

Those facilities in bush fire prone areas are of particular concern to the BFMC due to their popularity during the warmer months and the unpredictability of the tourist's response to bush fire.

Changing land use is also of concern to the committee. A noticeable shift in the rural areas has occurred from primary production to rural living. This shift can result in an increase in fuels loads, particularly where grazing is reduced. Multiple Occupancies are common throughout both the coast and hinterland areas of Byron and Tweed Shires. Although exceptions occur, they are of particular concern due to access, water supply and fuel (vegetation) management issues.

Education will be an important tool for the committee over the life of this plan.

1.3.4 History of bush fire frequency and ignition cause

The Far North Coast BFMC area has on average one hundred and thirty five bush fires per year, on average four of which could be considered to be major fires.

The main sources of ignition in the Far North Coast BFMC area are fire escape from legal or illegal fires (mainly prior to the introduction of the bush fire danger period), arson, and less frequently lightning strikes and power lines "arcing".

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Chapter 2. Identifying and assessing the bush fire risk

2.1 Process

The Australia/New Zealand Standard *AS/NZS 4360: 2004 Risk Management* was used as the basis for the risk assessment process. See Figure 2.1 for the steps involved. For a detailed description of the process undertaken see the Bush Fire Risk Management Planning Guidelines for Bush Fire Management Committees on the RFS website: www.rfs.nsw.gov.au.

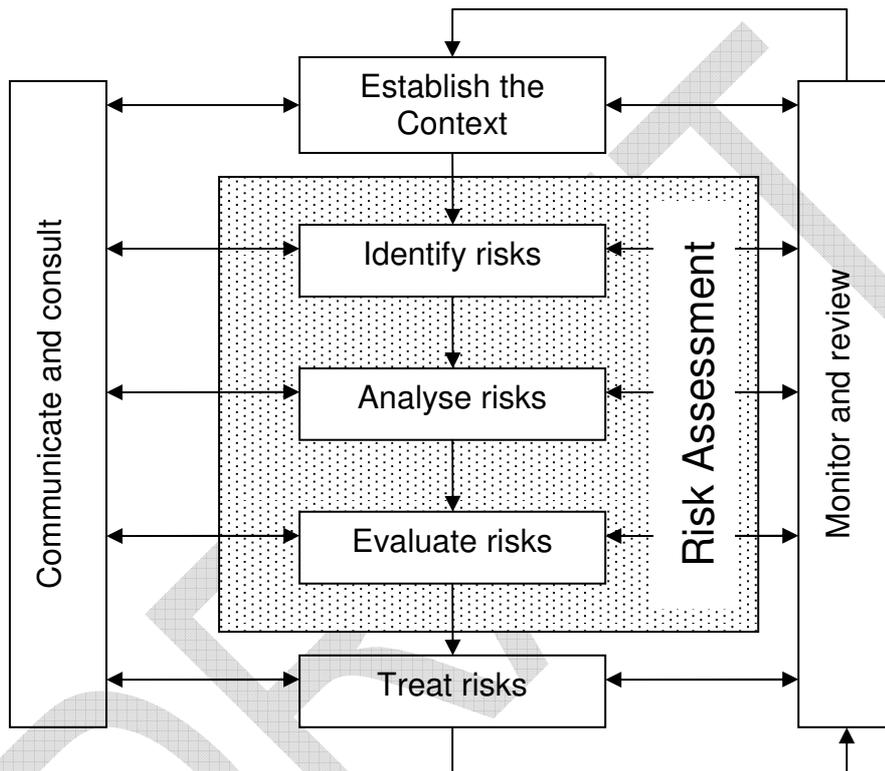


Figure 2.1 Overview of the risk assessment process

2.2 Communication and consultation

Community participation is an integral part of risk management. The Community Participation Strategy involved developing and implementing a process to address the needs, issues and concerns of stakeholders within the BFMC area in regards to the BFRMP. See Appendix 1 for the Community Participation Strategy used by the Far North Coast BFMC in preparing this BFRMP.

2.3 Identifying the bush fire risk

Identifying the level of bush fire risk firstly involved identifying important community assets considered to be at risk from bush fire in the Far North

Coast BFMC area, and then assessing the likelihood and consequence ratings.

2.3.1 Assets

BFMC members and the community, including RFS volunteers, identified assets within the Far North Coast BFMC that they believed were at risk of bush fire.

The assets were divided into four asset types:

Human settlement

- Residential areas including urban bushland interface areas and rural properties;
- Special Fire Protection areas including schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and tourist facilities; and
- Other human settlement areas including commercial and industrial areas where distinct from major towns.

Economic

- Agricultural; e.g. major rural industries for the area sugar cane farms, hydroponics farms, tree crops and grazing land;
- Commercial/industrial e.g. major industries, waste treatment plants, sawmills;
- Infrastructure e.g. large power lines, gas and oil pipelines, railway lines, electricity substations, communication facilities;
- Tourist and recreational e.g. tourist sites and facilities, resorts, retreats;
- Mines;
- Commercial forests e.g. pine plantations, eucalypt plantations and commercial native forests; and
- Drinking water catchments.

Environmental

- Threatened species, populations and ecological communities and Ramsar wetlands;
- Locally important species and ecological communities, such as species and ecological communities especially sensitive to fire.

Cultural

- Aboriginal significance – Aboriginal places and items of significance;
- Non-indigenous heritage – places and items arising from the early occupation of NSW by European or other non-indigenous settlers; and
- Other cultural assets – community halls, clubs and recreational facilities.

See Appendix 2 for the full list of assets identified in the Far North Coast BFMC area. See maps 1-8 for the location of assets to be treated under this BFRMP.

2.3.2 Assessing the bush fire risk - consequence

Once the assets were identified, the consequence of a bush fire impacting on these assets was assessed.

See Appendix 2 for the consequence ratings assigned to each asset identified in the Far North Coast BFMC area.

The different asset types had different assessment processes used to determine the consequence. These processes are identified below.

Human settlement

A potential fire behaviour model using vegetation type, slope and separation distance was used to produce a threat rating for human settlement assets. The vulnerability of the asset to a bush fire was also assessed and a rating assigned. These ratings were then used to assess the consequence of a bush fire impacting upon a human settlement asset.

Special Fire Protection (SFP) assets were considered inherently more vulnerable to bush fire due to mobility capacity, knowledge or other issues relating to their inhabitants, (e.g. the elderly, infirm, children or tourists) and therefore stricter requirements for vulnerability assessment and rating were applied.

Economic

The level of economic impact e.g. local, regional or state, as well as the economic recovery costs (how long and complicated a financial recovery will be) of the asset were identified. These ratings were used to assess the consequence of a bush fire impacting upon an economic asset.

Environmental

Environmental assets with known minimum fire threshold were assessed to determine if they were at risk of a bush fire within the 5 year life of the BFRMP using fire history and fire threshold data. Those environmental assets which were within or above the fire threshold were not assessed in the BFRMP, as the negative impact of a fire within the 5 year period was determined as being low and may even be of benefit to the asset and surrounding habitat.

The vulnerability of an environmental asset was determined by its conservation status and its geographic extent (distribution across the landscape). Vulnerability and potential impact of bush fire were used to assess the consequence of a bush fire impacting upon an environmental asset.

Cultural

For non-indigenous historical, Aboriginal and other cultural assets a potential fire behaviour model using fuel load, slope and proximity was used to produce a threat rating. The physical vulnerability of the asset to a bush fire was also assessed. These ratings were then used to assess the consequence of a bush fire impacting upon a cultural asset.

2.3.3 Assessing the bush fire risk - likelihood

For all asset types the likelihood of a bush fire occurring was assessed. This involves considering fire history, including ignition cause and patterns, known fire paths, access, containment potential and potential fire run (size of the vegetated area). See Appendix 2 for the likelihood ratings assigned to each asset identified in the Far North Coast BFMC area.

2.3.4 Identifying the level of risk

The consequence and likelihood ratings were then used to identify the level of risk. See Appendix 2 for the risk ratings assigned to each asset identified in the Far North Coast BFMC area.

2.3.5 Evaluating the bush fire risk

Once the risk ratings for each asset were identified, they were evaluated to:

- a) confirm that risk levels identified in the risk analysis process are appropriate and reflect the relative seriousness of the bush fire risk;
- b) identify which assets require treatments; and
- c) identify treatment priorities.

2.3.6 Prioritising treatments

No organisation has limitless resources to deal with adverse risk. It is therefore necessary to define priorities. The bush fire risk ratings determined were used to prioritise the risk treatments, i.e. areas of extreme risk were considered first for treatment, then very high, then high then medium and then low. It was also necessary to prioritise within the risk levels i.e. determining which of the high risks was the most serious. This was done on the basis of the consequence and likelihood ratings.

2.3.7 Risk acceptability

Risks below a certain level were assessed as not requiring treatment within the life of this plan. This is due to a combination of risk and the capacity for the member agencies to carry out the work. Within the *Far North Coast* BFMC area the level of acceptability is medium. Areas of low risk are likely to be managed by routine procedures and so do not require a specific application of resources.

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Chapter 3. Treating the risk

3.1 Bush Fire Management Zones

Bush Fire Management Zones were identified within the Far North Coast BFMC area and mapped (see maps 1-8). These zones identify the fire management intent for a specific area. See Table (3.1) for descriptions of the zones and their purposes. The four categories of Bush Fire Management Zones are:

- Asset Protection Zone (APZ);
- Strategic Fire Advantage Zone (SFAZ);
- Land Management Zone (LMZ); and
- Fire Exclusion Zone (FEZ).

Some of these zones (usually Land Management Zones) may be further classified within this category by the land manager, e.g. LMZ -Heritage Management Zone (NPWS).

Zone	Purpose	Suppression Objective(s)	Zone characteristics
Asset Protection Zone	To protect human life, property and highly valued public assets and values.	To enable the safe use of Direct Attack suppression strategies within the zone. To minimise bush fire impacts on undefended assets.	As per RFS document <i>Standards for Asset Protection Zones</i> . Max. fuel load 5 t/ha for forested areas.
Strategic Fire Advantage Zone	To provide strategic areas of fire protection advantage which will reduce the speed and intensity of bush fires, and reduce the potential for spot fire development.	To enable the safe use of Parallel Attack suppression strategies within the zone. To enable the safe use of Indirect Attack (back burning) in high to very high fire weather conditions within the zone. To prevent crown fire development within the zone. To minimise spot fire ignition potential from the zone.	Zone width related to suppression objectives and dependant upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography • Aspect • Spotting propensity • Location of adjacent firebreaks • Mosaic pattern of treatment Suggest fuel load managed between 8-12 t/ha for forested areas.
Land Management Zone	To meet relevant land management objectives in areas where APZs or SFAZs are not appropriate.	As per the land management and fire protection objectives of the responsible land management agency. To reduce the likelihood of spread of fires. To undertake mosaic burning	As appropriate to achieve land management e.g. heritage and/or fire protection e.g. broad scale mosaic burning objectives.
Fire Exclusion Zone	To exclude bush fires.	N/A	Variable dependant on size of fire sensitive area requiring protection.

Table 3.1 Bush Fire Management Zones: Purpose, objectives and characteristics

Note: All areas that are not mapped or described as APZs or SFAZs are considered as LMZs.

Within the Far North Coast BFMC area, zoning indicated on the maps should be considered as indicative only and the boundaries of the zones should be confirmed via site inspection by a member agency.

*For the purpose of the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code:

1. Plantations that are approved under the *Plantations & Reafforestation Act 1999* after closure of the public exhibition period for this BFRMP are considered to be identified in this BFRMP; and
2. Retained vegetation within the aforementioned plantations is considered to be a Strategic Fire Advantage Zone identified in the text of this BFRMP as long as it meets the suppression objectives for SFAZs included in the BFRMP, and is not mapped or otherwise described as a Fire Exclusion Zone in the BFRMP.

3.2 BFMC wide treatments

BFMC wide treatments are activities which reduce the overall bush fire risk within the BFMC area and are undertaken on an ongoing basis as part of normal business. These treatments are not linked to specific assets in the BFRMP, rather they are applied across all or part of the BFMC area as designated by legislation or agency policy. BFMC wide treatments include the following:

- **Reviewing the bush fire prone land map**

These maps identify bush fire prone land and are used to trigger whether a development application is assessed using *Planning for Bush Fire Protection*¹.

- **Ensuring developments in bush fire prone land comply with *Planning for Bush Fire Protection***

This assessment process requires new applications for development to include bush fire protection measures.

- **Using the Local Environment Plan/s (LEPs) to control developments in areas with a bush fire risk**

LEPs can be used to exclude development in extreme bush fire risk areas or where bush fire protection measures cannot be incorporated.

- **Varying the standard bush fire danger period as required**

In years where the weather is particularly adverse the bush fire danger period may be brought in early or extended. This is assessed every year by the BFMC.

¹ NSW Rural Fire Service 2006 *Planning for Bush Fire Protection: A guide for councils, planners, fire authorities and developers.*

- **Requiring permits during the bush fire danger period**

In the bush fire danger period a fire safety permit is required to light a fire in the open. Permits specify conditions such as fire fighting equipment that must be on site, or restrict burns based on weather conditions.
- **Prosecution of arsonists/offenders**

Under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* persons may be prosecuted for breaching the conditions on a fire permit, lighting a fire during a Total Fire Ban, allowing fire to escape their property, or other breaches of the Act.
- **Investigation of bush fire cause**

All bush fires which do not have a known cause are investigated to identify how they started.
- **Normal fire suppression activities**

Responding to bush fire is a normal business activity for the fire fighting authorities.
- **Assessing and managing compliance with strategic fire fighting resource allocation provisions**

Strategic fire fighting resource allocation provisions is the process used to identify the number of stations, brigades and appliances required in an area, and considers members, training, assets and hazards.
- **Preparation of a S52 Operations Coordination Plan**

The Operations Coordination Plan is prepared biannually and sets out how coordinated fire fighting will occur. It includes specific operational restrictions on fire fighting techniques in certain areas, where fires will be managed from, and how agencies involved can communicate during operations.
- **Fire Management Plans or Plans of Management**

Some land management agencies have developed fire management plans or plans of management with specific fire or fuel management strategies, for example a Forests NSW Regional Fuel Management Risk Plan, a NPWS Fire Management Strategy. These publicly exhibited plans form the basis for operational fire planning on public parks, reserves and forests.
- **Bush Fire Hazard Complaints**

If someone is concerned about possible bush fire hazards on a neighbouring property or any other land, then this can be reported to the RFS Commissioner or their local RFS Fire Control Centre. The complaint will be investigated and may result in a notice being issued to the landowner or manager to reduce the hazard.

3.3 Asset specific treatments

There are six broad strategy groups available to treat the bush fire risk to assets identified in the BFRMP.

The types of asset specific treatments in each strategy group used in the Far North Coast BFMC area are listed below. A full list of the treatment strategies in the Far North Coast BFMC area are in Appendix 3.

Strategy	Targeted treatments used in the <i>Far North Coast BFMC area</i>
Ignition Management	Treatments aim to reduce fire occurrence or the spread of fire. For example patrols on Total Fire Ban Days or inclusion of gates to fire trails to reduce access to areas that arson is common.
Hazard Reduction	Treatments aim to reduce the amount of fuel available for a bush fire. For example hazard reduction via burning in a strategic fire advantage zone.
Community Education	Treatments aim to better prepare the public for bush fire. For example educating a property owner on best practice methods for implementing an asset protection zone.
Property Planning	Treatments that aim to prepare properties and provide Brigades with pre incident information. For example the creation of pre-incident plans on multiple occupancies.
Preparedness	Treatments that aim to maintain and utilise existing resources. For example the maintenance of fire trails listed in the relevant local government areas fire trail register.
Other	Any other unique treatments to the area. For example researching fuel accumulation in Camphor Laurel forests.

Table 3.2 Examples of treatments used in the Far North Coast BFMC area

3.4 Fire thresholds

The vegetation in the Far North Coast BFMC area was classified into fire threshold categories (Table 3.3). See map 9 for fire threshold mapping of the vegetation in the Far North Coast BFMC area.

Vegetation formation	Minimum SFAZ Threshold	Minimum LMZ Threshold	Maximum Threshold	Notes
Rainforest	NA	NA	NA	Fire should be avoided.
Alpine complex	NA	NA	NA	Fire should be avoided.
Wet Sclerophyll forest (shrubby subformation)	25	30	60	Crown fires should be avoided in the lower end of the interval range.
Wet Sclerophyll forest (grassy subformation)	10	15	50	Crown fires should be avoided in the lower end of the interval range.
Grassy woodland	5	8	40	Minimum interval of 10 years should apply in the southern Tablelands area. Occasional intervals greater than 15 years may be desirable.
Grassland	2	3	10	Occasional intervals greater than 7 years should be included in coastal areas. There was insufficient data to give a maximum interval; available evidence indicates maximum intervals should be approximately 10 years.
Dry sclerophyll forest (shrub/grass subformation)	5	8	50	Occasional intervals greater than 25 years may be desirable.
Dry sclerophyll forest (shrub subformation)	7	10	30	Occasional intervals greater than 25 years may be desirable.
Heathlands	7	10	30	Occasional intervals greater than 20 years may be desirable.
Freshwater wetlands	6	10	35	Occasional intervals greater than 30 years may be desirable.
Forested wetlands	7	10	35	Some intervals greater than 20 years may be desirable.
Saline wetlands	NA	NA	NA	Fire should be avoided.
Semi-arid woodlands (grassy subformation)	6	9	No max	Not enough data for a maximum fire interval.
Semi-arid woodlands (shrubby subformation)	10	15	No Max	Not enough data for a maximum fire interval.
Arid shrublands (chenopod subformation)	NA	NA	NA	Fire should be avoided.
Arid shrublands (acacia subformation)	10	15	No Max	Not enough data for a maximum fire interval.

Table 3.3 Fire Thresholds for Vegetation Categories

3.5 Annual works programs

The land management agencies and fire fighting authorities responsible for implementing the treatments identified in this plan will include those treatments in their annual works programs detailing how, when, and where the required activities will be undertaken.

3.6 Implementation

When the treatments identified in this BFRMP are implemented there are a number of issues that need to be considered by the responsible agency including environmental assessments and approvals, smoke management and prescribed burn plans.

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Chapter 4. Performance monitoring and reviewing

4.1 Review

This BFRMP must be reviewed and updated within each successive five-year period from the constitution of the BFMC. The Far North Coast BFMC will also review this plan as necessary to account for any changes in context or risk. This may be triggered by a range of circumstances, including but not limited to:

- changes to the BFMC area, organisational responsibilities or legislation;
- changes to the bush fire risk in the area; or
- following a major fire event.

4.2 Monitoring

The BFMC is required to monitor progress towards the completion of treatment works listed in the BFRMP, and the timeliness of the works.

4.3 Reporting

The BFMC is required to report annually to the BFCC on its progress in implementing the bush fire risk management activities identified in this plan.

4.4 Performance Measurements

State wide performance measurements which are linked to the BFRMP objectives have been identified within Appendix G of BFCC Policy 03/2007. All BFMCs must use these to monitor and report on their success in reducing the bush fire risk in their BFMC area.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Community Participation Strategy

Appendix 2 Asset Register

Documents to be attached separately.

Appendix 3 Treatment Register

Documents to be attached separately.

Appendix 4 Maps

Documents to be attached separately.

1. North East Tweed
2. Central Tweed Coast
3. Central Tweed
4. Western Tweed
5. North East Byron Shire and South East Tweed
6. Central Byron
7. Byron Bay and Hinterland
8. Ballina Coast and Hinterland
9. Fire Threshold Map Tweed and Byron Shires