

DCLM FIRE REVIEW INFORMATION PAPER

On April 10th 2003 the Minister for the Environment requested advice from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) on the Department of Conservation and Land Management's (DCLM's) fire management policy and practices in its Swan, South West and Warren administrative regions.

The Minister indicated that the public should be fully involved during the EPA's review. The EPA is making this review as open as possible to members of the public and seeking your opinions on what you believe are the important issues.

TERMS OF REFERENCE The Minister has defined the review in the context of DCLM's obligations to manage fire on the lands it manages, for the multiple objectives of:

- protection of human life;
- biodiversity conservation and protection;
- protection of assets including strategic infrastructure on managed lands;
- protection of environmental health; and
- the reasonable protection of neighbouring properties and assets.

There is no implied priority in the order in which the terms of reference are written.

FIRST STEPS The review has begun with a meeting between the EPA and a representative group of stakeholders to discuss the steps proposed to progress the review, bearing in mind the agreed terms of reference. The meeting was held in mid-September 2003. Attending were representatives from the forestry industry, forest conservation interests, government planners, farmers, local government, the insurance industry, and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority. The review steps have subsequently been adopted by the EPA.

INFORMATION DAYS Information Days are being held in Albany, Walpole, Manjimup, Bunbury, Perth and Mundaring during late November to early December. These are a way of seeking information and feedback from the general community and interest groups. The Information Days aim to introduce the review and its terms of reference. In particular the EPA today is keen to know your views on issues that should be addressed by the review and in the forthcoming Discussion Paper.

WHERE TO FROM HERE? After these Information Days the EPA will prepare and release its Discussion Paper for public comment early in 2004. Information on how to make a submission will be included.

DISCUSSION PAPER The aim of this is to summarise the issues surrounding DCLM's fire management policies and practices in the review area, and to suggest options for consideration to achieve optimal outcomes for public safety and health, biodiversity and the protection of assets, both public and private. The EPA will not make recommendations in its Discussion Paper as it is first seeking your views on what are the main issues to consider. Instead, it will put forward options for discussion.

ISSUES WHICH COULD BE ADDRESSED IN THE DISCUSSION PAPER

The following are issues that the EPA is aware of that could be addressed in the Discussion Paper. The list is not comprehensive and your comment on them and identification of additional issues will be important to this review:

- The values (conservation and cultural) of the land within the review area. The area covered by the DCLM administrative areas of Swan South West and Warren extends from Lancelin in the north to the south coast and eastwards to Albany in a strip 80-100km wide and encompasses a broad range of habitats and land uses.
- Wildfires and their causes. Trends in their occurrence-changing climate. What effects on biodiversity? Should we leave lightning-induced fires to burn if in wilderness / national parks and reserves / State forest?
- Fighting wildfires. Speed of response usually critical-much easier to put out in the first minutes or hours. Sometimes impossible to fight depending on the weather conditions and the amount of fuel available to burn. Capacity to respond to a number of fires simultaneously. FESA's operational policies.
- Access infrastructure- roads, bridges, firebreaks. Implications of keeping open or closing, to restrict people, erosion, spread of dieback and weeds, esp. with regard to wilderness areas. Does it affect the risk of wildfires spreading into adjacent areas?
- Prescribed burns. How much, how often, when (meteorology-modelling)? Fewer days available when conditions are right now it's drier. Is there a backlog of areas to be burnt and consequent fuel build-up?
- Do DCLM burns do what they are supposed to? How to check afterwards whether the forecast effects happened.
- Resourcing for prescribed burns. The finer grained and more complex the pattern of burns prescribed the more it costs to carry out.
- Costs of wildfires. Are prescribed burns cost-effective insurance?
- Should health effects of smoke from burns and complaints from the public further restrict the number of days when burns can be carried out?
- Property adjacent to DCLM-managed lands. Who is legally responsible? Land ownership and control responsibilities and strategies:-privately held land vs State forests, national parks / nature reserves. The differences between the land uses and management

strategies on each type. Greater or lesser fire risks?

- Role of local government authorities, State agencies-zoning and planning for buffers for protection; and possible differences between planning, which is the responsibility of the Conservation Commission, and implementation of the Commission's plans by CALM.
- Protection of properties and evacuations from fires. Which authority is in charge of evacuations? Local knowledge versus bureaucracy from the city. Operational practices, operational effectiveness and the role of volunteer firefighters.
- How much personal responsibility should private landowners take if they choose to live in fire-prone settings? Fire mitigation and prevention approaches such as house design, sprinklers, appropriate plantings close to houses, etc.
- Mopping up and post-fire recovery programmes.

EPA's ADVICE The EPA will collate submissions to the Discussion Paper and use the information to prepare its advice to the Minister for the Environment. Its advice will compare Western Australian practices with those from elsewhere and consider issues raised by the public before making recommendations on appropriate fire policy and fire management practices for DCLM-managed land in the Southwest. It is expected to be complete by April 2004.