



**Public Transport
Authority**



Bushfire Management Strategy



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Introduction

Background

The Public Transport Authority (PTA) has prepared this Bushfire Management Strategy to outline its approach to bushfire risk reduction across PTA owned, managed or leased land. It has been prepared in response to increased community concern at the potential threat of wildfire, as well as to address the PTA's statutory responsibilities with respect to bushfire hazard reduction. This strategy does not cover the PTA's response to fire emergencies or recovery procedures, which are addressed in its Emergency Management Manual.

The PTA owns, manages and leases large areas of land throughout Western Australia, predominantly comprising long, linear railway corridors which traverse a variety of landscapes, climates, soils and vegetation. Other areas include smaller parcels of land with facilities such as depots and stations. This presents a unique challenge in terms of bushfire management and provides the driver for the development of a strategy to address management and mitigation measures in an integrated, collaborative and consistent way.

Local governments and the community have expressed concern about fire ignition from operational and maintenance activities (e.g. repair works, hot works) and fire spreading through vegetation on PTA land. It is therefore important to integrate management of this bushfire risk into large-scale landscape management practices. The PTA currently undertakes bushfire risk reduction practices and this strategy aims to capture these in a set of strategic actions. These practices need to be balanced with conservation and Aboriginal heritage aspects, as there are areas of PTA land with cultural significance and many of the rail corridors contain remnant vegetation with high conservation values (e.g. threatened flora). Therefore, this strategy has been developed to bring together the current procedures whilst also preserving biodiversity and Aboriginal heritage.

Target Land

This strategy applies to all the land currently owned, managed or leased by the PTA within Western Australia (**PTA Land**).

Aim

The overall aim of this strategy is to reduce the risk of bushfire to human settlement, economic, environmental and cultural assets on PTA Land.

Application

This strategy applies to all activities and operations undertaken by the PTA and its contractors and subcontractors on PTA Land (including construction, maintenance and operational activities). These activities and operations comprise those with the potential to cause bushfire and those implemented for the purpose of mitigating bushfire risk.

Legislation

Land management authorities have a legal responsibility under the *Bush Fires Act 1954*, in relation to bushfire prevention, control and extinguishment. The PTA is responsible for, among other things, ensuring fuel loadings and fire breaks are maintained to an acceptable level in accordance with the *Bush Fires Act 1954*. A summary of the legislative requirements relevant to this strategy is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Relevant legislation

Legislation and Regulatory Authority	Relevance
<i>Bush Fires Act 1954</i> Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) (formerly FESA) and Local Government	PTA is responsible for ensuring fuel loadings and fire breaks are maintained to an acceptable level and under the Act local governments can issue notices to reduce fuel loads and clear firebreaks.
<i>Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia Act 1998</i> DFES	Outlines the powers and functions of DFES in relation to the management of emergency services for Western Australia, including responding to bushfires that start on PTA Land.
<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> Department of the Environment	Protection of biodiversity – clearing of native vegetation for fire management activities that will have significant impact on a ‘matter of national environmental significance’ (e.g. threatened species) require authorisation under the Act.
<i>Environmental Protection Act 1986</i> Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and Department of Environment Regulation	Under Schedule 6, the PTA is exempt from requiring a permit to clear native vegetation under the fire prevention requirements issued by local governments under Section 33 of the <i>Bush Fires Act 1954</i> . This includes activities such as clearing of firebreaks.
<i>Land Administration Act 1997</i>	Under the Act, the PTA has the care, control and management of railway reserves which are Crown land.
<i>Wildlife Conservation Act 1950</i> Department of Parks and Wildlife	Protects flora native to Western Australia and all native Australian fauna, including species that may be impacted by fire management activities within PTA owned or managed land.

Definitions

Relevant definitions to this strategy are outlined below.

Bushfire: Unplanned vegetation fire. A generic term which includes grass fires, forest fires and scrub fires both with and without a suppression objective.

Bushfire mitigation: Activities undertaken for the purpose of minimising the incidence and impact of bushfires.

Bushfire risk: The chance of a bushfire occurring that will have harmful consequences to human settlement, economic, environmental and cultural assets.

Fuel Load: The amount of flammable material that could serve as fuel for a bushfire. Fuel is the availability, size, arrangement, moisture content and type of flammable materials available.

Hot works: Works involving the process of generating significant heat or sparks. This can include grinding, welding, the use of oxy acetylene cutting or heating, use of naked flames and other similar operations.

Prescribed burn: The planned application of fire to a predetermined area, under prescribed environmental conditions, to achieve specific land management objectives.

Objectives

The objectives of this Bushfire Management Strategy are outlined below.

- 1. To mitigate bushfire risks to people as well as human settlement, economic, environmental and cultural assets on PTA Land**
 - People – PTA employees, contractors, subcontractors and the public
 - Properties – infrastructure and assets on PTA Land
 - Environment – the existing environment within and immediately surrounding PTA land
- 2. To preserve the conservation values on PTA Land**
 - Maintenance of existing conservation values within PTA Land
- 3. To integrate bushfire mitigation measures at a landscape scale**
 - Integration of applied management measures with other measures undertaken by local governments and fire authorities, to reduce the bushfire risk at a landscape scale

Roles and Responsibilities

The following authorities and stakeholders have responsibilities relevant to this Bushfire Management Strategy.

PTA

The PTA has an overarching responsibility for minimising bushfire risk on PTA Land as well as liaising with local governments and fire authorities in relation to managing this risk. This includes the passenger and freight rail lines, stations, depots as well as other facilities. The PTA, as a State government agency, is responsible under the *State Emergency Plan for Fire (Westplan – Fire)* to contribute to bushfire risk management planning with local governments.

PTA responsibilities include:

- Mitigating bushfire risk on PTA Land through fuel reduction activities and maintenance of firebreaks
- Developing and implementing procedures to minimise bushfire risk from maintenance activities
- Ensuring that leaseholders and tenants are fulfilling their responsibilities relating to mitigating bushfire risk
- Responding to fire protection notices issued by local governments (firebreak and fuel load notices) in accordance with Section 33 of the *Bush Fires Act 1954*
- Implementing emergency response measures and providing support to responding agencies in the event of a bushfire on or threatening PTA land
- Liaison with fire authorities and local governments regarding bushfire mitigation strategies on PTA land
- Being a consultative party to local governments and fire authorities in the preparation of their Bushfire Risk Management Plans (BRMP's)

Other leaseholders and tenants

Leaseholders and tenants are responsible for minimising bushfire risk on the land which they lease or occupy. In this situation, the leaseholder or tenant undertakes management measures on PTA Land and is responsible for ensuring fuel loadings and fire breaks are maintained to an acceptable level in accordance with the *Bush Fires Act 1954*.

Brookfield Rail currently leases the network infrastructure from the PTA and has a corridor land use agreement with the PTA. This arrangement is for a period of 49 years, during which time Brookfield Rail maintains the corridor and fixed railway infrastructure and has commercial arrangements with private train operators who operate trains. The width of the corridor managed by Brookfield Rail varies across the network (averaging 40-45 metres), as does the type and extent of bushfire prone vegetation. Brookfield Rail manages substantial areas of vegetation within these corridors, and is responsible for reducing the associated bushfire hazard. To address this, Brookfield Rail must conduct fuel reduction measures such as weed control and vegetation slashing on its leased freight railway corridors or other actions as identified in Bushfire Management Plans submitted to local governments. Other leaseholders also undertake bushfire mitigation measures appropriate to the land use and location, such as regional bus depots.

Department of Fire and Emergency Services

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is responsible for fire management across the State, including provision of technical fire-related advice to assist decision-makers and responding to fire emergencies. It is important to note that bushfire risk management is a shared responsibility between a variety of different parties, and DFES does not have sole responsibility for this. DFES provides advice to the PTA regarding bushfire mitigation measures and safe operating procedures and responds to fire emergencies that start on PTA Land within the gazetted fire district.

Under section 22a of the *Bush Fires Act 1954*, the Minister for Emergency Services can declare a Total Fire Ban, which prohibits the lighting of a fire, or any activities that may start a fire. Under section 22c of the Act, DFES issues the PTA with an exemption to undertake hot works on the urban railway network (e.g. welding, cutting and grinding) during Total Fire Ban periods.

Local governments

Local governments are responsible for responding to and managing fires within their jurisdiction, as well as the prevention, preparedness and recovery from bushfires.

In accordance with Westplan – Fire, local governments are responsible for preparing an integrated Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (BRMP) which details the bush fire prevention and mitigation measures across all tenures, including PTA Land. Local governments are also responsible for issuing and enforcing firebreaks and fuel hazard reduction notices issued under section 33 of the *Bush Fires Act 1954*. Local governments may therefore issue fire protection notices to the PTA or its leaseholders.

Local governments also appoint and manage local bush fire control officers and bush fire brigades, who provide fire prevention and control services for their local area. This may include PTA Land, with the agreement of the relevant local government.

Department of Parks and Wildlife

The Department of Parks and Wildlife (Parks and Wildlife) have a responsibility for managing fires within their jurisdiction. Parks and Wildlife are also responsible for bushfire mitigation on lands within their control. Parks and Wildlife may also be required to provide specialist advice in relation to bushfire mitigation strategies, particularly where there are specific environmental concerns.

Adjacent landholders

Adjacent landholders are responsible for managing the bushfire hazard on their properties and acting in accordance with fire protection notices issued by their local government authority.

Strategic Actions

The PTA will ensure that the following six strategic actions are implemented, on land for which it is responsible, noting that land under the control of Brookfield Rail is Brookfield Rail's responsibility.

1. Provide input as required into bushfire risk assessments undertaken by local governments and fire authorities. Assist with the identification of risks to people and assets which exist on PTA Land and to determine which mitigation measures should be implemented. Risks and treatment (mitigation) action plans for which the PTA will be responsible for implementing will be documented in the PTA's risk management system.
2. Implement strategies for fuel reduction on PTA Land, taking into account conservation, infrastructure, cultural and other surrounding land values. These strategies will include weed control, maintenance of fire breaks and mechanical fuel reduction, but will exclude prescribed burning.
3. Contribute to long-term bushfire mitigation strategies in conjunction with local governments and other land managers in areas where bushfire risk has been identified as an issue of concern. This includes contributing to local government BRMPs where PTA Land is present within that local government.
4. Implement bushfire preparedness actions to address the threat of bushfire, including:
 - Ensuring controlled access to PTA Land, including maintenance of access tracks and assistance with access for responding agencies
 - Having in place safe operating procedures for high risk activities (e.g. hot works)
 - Designating asset protection zones on a specific risk and site basis
 - Adhering to the fire emergency response procedures within the PTA Emergency Management Manual
 - Land management practices including maintenance of signage and fencing and removing dumped rubbish
5. Contribute to bushfire hazard reduction on PTA land through in-kind donations, the funding of fuel reduction activities (such as weed control, but excluding prescribed burning) and provide any necessary assistance with regard to rail safety to allow access to PTA Land. Contributions will be determined in consultation with local government and fire authorities and formalised in local government BRMPs.
6. Liaise with key stakeholders to ensure that up to date data are used to identify aboriginal heritage and vegetation conservation values within PTA Land and ensure bushfire hazard reduction activities take into consideration areas of high conservation value and Aboriginal sites. Specific aspects of these hazard reduction activities that may cause impacts include:
 - Infrastructure maintenance – weed control and vegetation slashing along railway tracks and around structures and facilities
 - Installation and maintenance of firebreaks and access tracks – clearing, weed control, grading, vegetation slashing and mowing

Records

All records relating to key decision making will be kept within the PTA's Electronic Document Records Management System.

Monitor and Review

Monitor

The monitoring and evaluation component of the strategy is designed to provide the information required to progressively refine the strategy to ensure it is achieving its desired outcomes. This monitoring is based on the recording of fire incidents and the reporting metric within the PTA's internal Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) system.

All bushfires on PTA Land will be recorded as an incident in this internal system and investigated, and may be subject to a formal investigation by the relevant authorities. The aim of this investigation will be to determine the root cause of the incident and to identify corrective actions that will be undertaken to ensure the incident does not occur again, or reduce the impacts of the fire.

All fire incidents will be reviewed by the Executive HSE Management Committee on a quarterly basis. As part of this process, trends in the frequency and types of incidents will be reviewed, and there will be checks to see if investigations have been closed out.

Success of the strategy will be determined through a reduction in the number of bushfire related incidents on PTA Land. Where this performance target has not been achieved, a review of the strategic actions within the strategy will be undertaken.

Review

Annually, or as necessary, the PTA's Bushfire Management Strategy will be reviewed to determine whether the strategic actions are being implemented and are achieving the objectives. The Bushfire Management Strategy will be compared with PTA's current strategic and other plans to ensure compatibility.

Communications

The contents of this strategy will be communicated both internally within the PTA via corporate inductions and externally to local authorities, fire authorities, tenants and leaseholders. A copy of this strategy will also be made available to the public on the PTA website.