

Webinar Q&A: Preventing Bushfires
Tuesday 21 July 2020
Questions below answered by A/Prof Janet Stanley

Are fire academics' concerns about urban fringe planning getting heard in the Federal Government's review of the EPBC Act? I'm yet to read the interim report, however I would be extremely surprised if it covered this issue.

Thanks for the informative and interesting talks. In regards to providing people with information about protecting their properties and understanding the risks their properties possess, what do you think is the most effective way to communicate this information to home owners and communities? My view is that we need have local groups who are given the resources and power to make local discussions, in association with other stakeholders and emergency services. There is currently a policy in Victoria of shared responsibility, that at the moment top down directives. Rather, there should be shared information, recognising that local people also have a lot of knowledge about their local area, such as social and environmental vulnerability to fire.

What if any place do you see for traditional firestick ecology as espoused by people such as Victor Steffensen and Vic Jurskis? Should we be maintaining the timber industry so that access roads can be maintained?

I haven't read either book. From my casual look, Vic Jurskis sounds a bit confused in his story. My view is that there is currently a lack of clear purpose in some of the prescribed burning – for ecology, fire purposes, land clearing, agricultural purposes?? I think we need to be very clear about what we are doing, respect the knowledge and methods of Cultural Burning and learn a lot from it. Prescribed burning, in my view, needs to be undertaken a lot more wisely, along with the many other approaches that are not being used to prevent the ignition of bushfires.

If we are to tackle climate change we need to maximise carbon storage in forests. Do we need to consciously consider protecting the forest from the people as well as the people from the forest? My view is that decision-makers (hopefully including the community) need to better take into account an holistic view of the value of forests. Forests are vitally important for human wellbeing in many ways, as well as a store for carbon, so we need to protect them.

Where in our current governance systems are their leverage points for reform? In a climate emergency will this be too little too late? Answered in talk

Do you think that shifting top-down approach into a community-led approach would be a more efficient way to manage the risk of bushfire? By engaging the vulnerable community into the planning process and decision-making, it will help people acknowledge how to respond to a bushfire. Absolutely

My question is, could you talk a little bit about how the landscape recover from bushfire, and how large and small scale design can help the post-bushfire scenario? The ability of landscape to recover from bushfire is very much dependent on the type of landscape and the heat, coverage and frequency of occurrence of fire. Some areas in Australia need fire to reproduce but then need to be fire free while the young plants grow to enable them to produce seed. Some landscapes (such as in Tasmania) do not recover from fire etc. Sorry, I'm unclear what your second part of the question means.

Many existing settlements in fire prone areas are also set amongst vegetation prized for its biodiversity and landscape character value etc. When applying planning controls to reflect the value of this vegetation, how do we maintain no net increase in bushfire risk? This is very difficult. I think it is important that the purchaser of land should understand any planning controls prior to purchasing the land – this is not commonly done. Research suggests that the most important bushfire safety approach is to keep the immediate area around the house free of inflammables. I think there should also be stronger incentives to undertake fire safety modifications in the house when in a fine risk area. Bunkers/shelters will also be an important addition but research is needed on the form/design of these.

I lived in the Bend of Islands in the 1990s and we had community fire education and action on prevention and fire readiness. What studies are there on best practice community responses that are generic grassroots organisation. I'm sorry I don't know if there are any studies on this. Indeed, there is little research around anything to do with bushfire! Years ago Bend of Islands did picking up fuel sticks on the ground – I think I helped with this a long time ago! Is this still being done and did the community find this successful? I think it important to have a couple of choices about exiting the area when there is a fire – not present for Bend of Islands in the past.

With the quantum of built risk exposure to natural hazards already in place across the continent, are there any approaches that will ever allow us to catch up and actively reduce our collective risk exposure? Alan answered this.

What is the role of improved forest management and fuel reduction as a way of reducing hazard both in and around houses and infrastructure and more broadly in the landscape to allow rapid suppression when fires start under extreme conditions? [Answered at talk.](#)

Very good and valuable discussion, thank you.

I would like to see a change in awareness in our communities such as circular economy around renewable energy utilisation with best practice approaches in the holistic sense.

Circular Bioeconomy ...

Woody vegetation is stored solar energy and in AUS people talk about around Fuel Reduction and not Fuel = Bioenergy cogeneration.

Are you aware of PyCCS = Pyrogenic Carbon Capture & Sequestration ?

Feel free to get in touch with me via www.terrapretadevelopments.com.au

Sorry but I don't know enough about this to be able to comment.

Do you know if many arsonists are not convicted a lot because they are predominantly youths or because they are not identified? Do you think tougher laws would be beneficial? There are many reasons for this. Yes, age is a factor. There needs to be more resources put into investigation of arson. Also many fires are not recorded, nor the cause known, especially if the fire is put out quickly. However, it may only be chance if the fire is suppressed quickly or turns into a big fire. I don't believe tougher laws would make a difference. Many people who maliciously light fires are troubled people.

The recent Gippsland fires had been forecasted for at least the last 5years. Given this, what are your thoughts on the mitigation/ preparedness that could of been undertaken?

Who starts at the local level for vulnerable people - CFA and councils are already stretched. And who determines who is considered as vulnerable? My view is that a whole lot more resources need to be put into prevention and preparation. I think local communities need to be offered resources and decision-making power to look after vulnerable people. Local people are also likely to know the areas of greatest fire risk.

Fuel reduction burning does NOT increase forest fire risk! I agree that it doesn't in some situations, but it has been found to increase risk in other situations – according to a growing body of research. I think there needs to be a lot more research on this issue and it is often unclear.

Are there any good models of ignition reduction (outside of GAPP) that you could point to, and any data around how much risk reduction we might expect from such programs? The police take action to both deter people at risk of lighting fires and to apprehend those that do. They need a lot more resources. Fire service undertake education programs, Parks Victoria has done a lot of good work around reducing camp fires. Some Local Governments have done work on prevention, such as removing dumped cars and rubbish in the bush which are commonly a target for fire lighters. Thus some things are being done, but it is too little and uncoordinated and not comprehensive. It is hard to know how much risk reduction to expect as it depends on whether prevention is conducted in a comprehensive and organised way.

The majority of the fires that burnt many communities in 2019-20 started from lightning strikes in remote areas, not arson. We need access to suppress these fires. Yes, it seems as if lightening is an increasing problem but we know very little about the cause of recent fires. Most fires are not investigated as to cause – assumptions are often made. The increase in lightning is related to a failure to address climate change.

Find Fire Cube (shelter) at this sites exhibits <https://www.srdchange.org.au/10/exhibits.html>

For Alan and perhaps Janet:

To reinforce the points just made about consultation - the regulatory system is insensitive to the specific needs and capacities of local communities, with real differences between low income residential households, knowledgeable locals, and well-resourced but transient and poorly informed holiday homers.

Wye is a good case in point. The Wye fire was a 'success' in that while lots of properties were lost, no one died. This reflected community understanding of what needed to happen in an extreme fire... abandon and retreat.

In the rebuild, in an area of persistent high risk, the use of BAL 40 rating for holiday homes is seen by many as overkill for holiday homes and incredibly financially onerous for under/uninsured locals. As a result, 'real' regulatory compliance is very uneven. Answered during talk

I guess the question is: how can community consultation best be used to add nuance to the planning regulatory frame? I think the community can make contributions in many other ways as they often better understand local conditions and vulnerabilities – both people and environment.