



POLICY NO. 01/2024

Management of Bush Fire Operations

Owner	Bush Fire Coordinating Committee
Contact	Executive Officer
BFCC Meeting	Meeting no. 109, Decision 109.11
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1 Policy Cancellation

- 1.1 The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy 02/2006 is hereby cancelled and replaced with this policy.

2 Rationale

- 2.1 The *Rural Fires Act 1997* charges the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC) with responsibility for planning in relation to bush fire prevention and for coordinated bush fire fighting activities in NSW. The BFCC is also responsible for advising the Commissioner on bush fire prevention, mitigation and coordinated bush fire suppression, as well as other functions under the Act.
- 2.2 Section 52 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* requires the preparation of a bush fire management plan of operations by a Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC). This policy describes the method and standard for preparing these plans, which are to be known as 'Plan of Operations'.
- 2.3 A range of supporting documents are available as annexures to this policy to assist BFMCs and agencies in facilitating coordinated and collaborative bush fire operations. The approve plan template is attached at Annexure A.

3 Principles

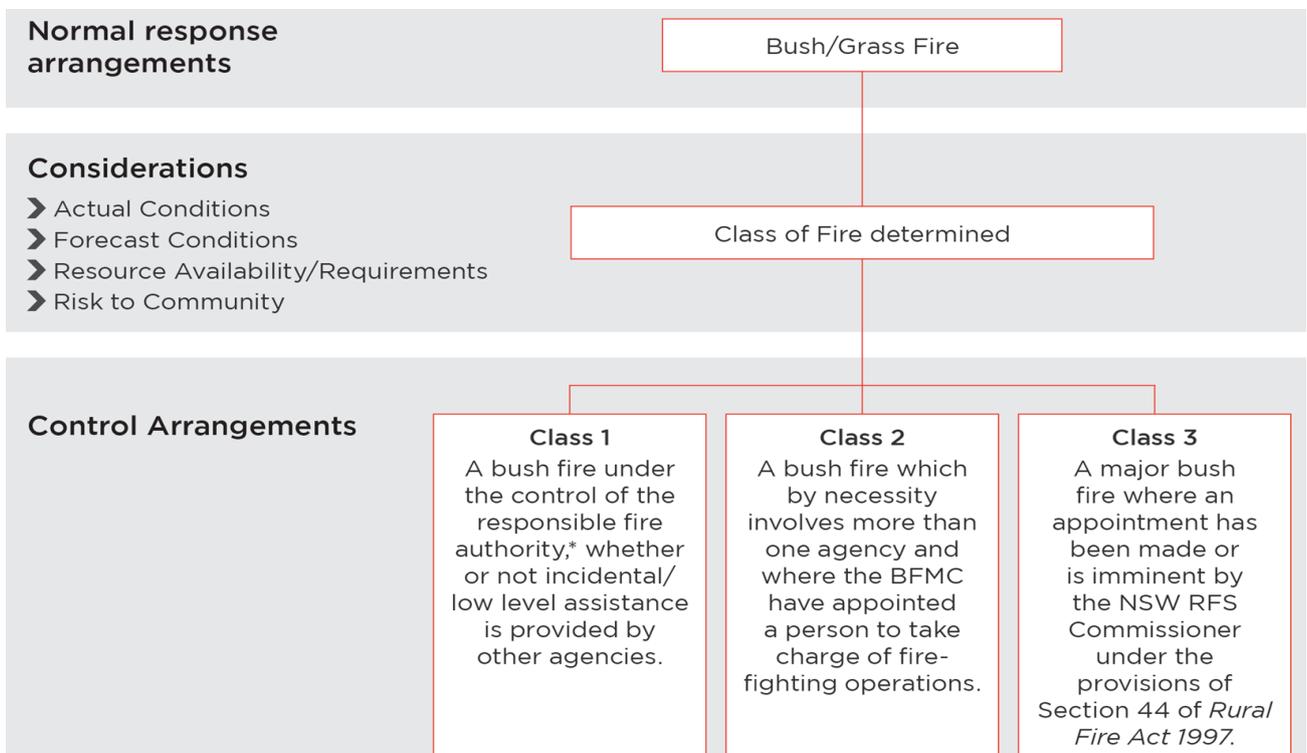
- 3.1 Plans of Operations to satisfy Section 52 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* must be prepared in accordance with the 'Plan of Operations' template. The template plan must incorporate the following principles:
 - Any fire fighting authority may make the first response to a bush fire. This responding fire fighting authority will take immediate steps to advise the land manager and relevant fire service in whose area the fire is burning, or will advise in accordance with any Memorandum of Understanding or Mutual Aid Agreement, of action being taken.
 - Any fire suppression techniques or activities for which prior authority from the land owner, occupier or land management agency is required or limitations consistent with section

38(4) of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* must be specified in the plan. Noting these cannot limit the intent or authority given by the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

- Personnel or equipment provided under the Plan of Operations for a bush fire will remain under the command of the supplying fire fighting authority unless that authority’s line commander indicates otherwise.
- Personnel or equipment provided under the Plan of Operations for a bush fire will remain under the control of the Incident Controller, for the period that the personnel or equipment are provided.

3.2 An Operations Map will be prepared for each BFMC. Its purpose is to provide a visual snapshot to personnel not familiar with the area and display the BFMC area boundaries, Fire Control Centre location(s), critical infrastructure, main roads, primary towns/villages, National Parks and State Forests. Further requirements regarding mapping are identified on page 16 ‘Mapping’ within the template plan.

3.3 All fires are classified in accordance with the Fire Classification system depicted below:



3.4 The determination as to whether a fire should be managed at Class 2 will be made by the relevant fire service in consultation with the relevant BFMC Fire Classification Group, and for Class 3 by the Commissioner Rural Fire Service, on the basis of a recommendation made by the relevant BFMC Fire Classification Group. Noting the Commissioner may make the determination without a recommendation from the applicable Fire Classification Group.

3.5 The BFMC Fire Classification Group should make a determination by consensus based on the current and expected situation and likely development of the fire or fires. Where agreement cannot be reached the RFS Commissioner via State Operations will make a determination to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

4 Requirements

- 4.1 Each BFMC is to develop and maintain an Operations Coordination Manual in accordance with Annexure D and must review the manual every two years following the constitution of the BFMC.
- 4.2 A pre-season checklist must be completed by each BFMC prior to 01 August each year in accordance with the standard checklist attached at Annexure B. BFMC pre-season checklists are to be collated by the RFS Commissioner via State Operations which will report to the BFCC.

5 Arrangements for the initial response to a bush fire

- 5.1 Where a fire fighting authority, other than the RFS or Fire and Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW) (hereafter referred to as the fire services), has responded to a bush fire and the fire services are not present:
- 5.2 The fire fighting authority must notify the relevant fire service of its initial response to the fire as soon as is practicable.
- 5.3 The Incident Controller will be determined by that fire fighting authority until such time as:
 - a rural fire brigade or FRNSW brigade is present at the fire and it has been determined by the senior officer of the Fire Service with statutory authority for the area in which the incident is located, (the relevant Fire Service) that incident control should be transferred to the relevant Fire Service; or
 - the relevant Fire Service has directed a member of that Fire Service or another person to assume the role of Incident Controller.
- 5.4 The fire fighting authority's Incident Controller must provide the relevant Fire Service with a situation report as soon as is practicable, which includes the following information:
 - the location of the fire;
 - its size and any relevant information in relation to its behaviour;
 - resources in attendance at the fire;
 - the local weather conditions;
 - the Alert level;
 - the proposed strategy to contain or control the spread of the fire; and
 - information in relation to any known injuries or damage to property.
- 5.5 The fire fighting authority's Incident Controller must provide the relevant Fire Service with further situation reports on a regular basis, together with any additional relevant information in relation to the management of the fire.
- 5.6 The fire fighting authority's Incident Controller must discuss any proposed significant changes to strategy prior to their implementation with the relevant Fire Service senior officer.
- 5.7 The situation reports must be provided to the relevant Fire Service in a timely manner using established processes including the ICON system. Relevant fire services will also maintain the ICON system.
- 5.8 Notwithstanding the above, consistent with statutory responsibility imposed by the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, the fire services reserve the right to assume control of any fire in their respective jurisdiction with absolute discretion, regardless of the tenure of the land on which the fire is burning or which fire fighting authority was first to respond.

6 Arrangements for the control of bush fires

- 6.1 Fire co-ordination and control at all classes of bush fire will be under the control of an Incident Controller (refer to clause 3.4 above regarding Classification of Fires).
- When suppressing a fire, the fire and land management policies and relevant plans of the land manager will be taken into account or considered as required by the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.
 - All fire fighting activities will, as far as practicable, be carried out in consultation with the responsible officer of the fire fighting authority or land manager in whose area the fire is burning.
 - For Class 1 Fires, the Incident Controller will be the Officer-in-Charge of the first suppression agency on scene, unless relieved or replaced.
 - For Class 2 Fires, an Incident Controller will be appointed by the relevant fire service to control fire fighting operations having considered a recommendation made by the relevant BFMC Fire Classification Group.
 - For Class 3 Fires, the RFS Commissioner will appoint an Incident Controller under Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, having considered any recommended nominees of the relevant BFMC Fire Classification Group.
 - Under a Section 44 appointment, the Incident Controller will form an Incident Management Team. The Incident Management Team (IMT) must include a person who has local knowledge of the area and can assist the IMT in effecting suppression activities.
 - Persons appointed as Incident Controllers for a Class 3 fire will relinquish their normal duties for the duration of their appointment.
 - During periods of a Section 44 declaration, the Incident Controller is subject to the direction of the RFS Commissioner. All personnel operating on a fire ground are subject to the direction of the Incident Controller irrespective of their source agency.
 - During fire fighting operations, due consideration must be given to the 'Minimal Impact Suppression and Rehabilitation Guidelines' attached at Annexure C.
- 6.2 A BFMC must hold an after action review following each Class 3 fire within its area in accordance with *RFS Incident Management Procedure 4.06 Conducting an Operational Debrief and Debrief Recommendations*. The debrief must be held as soon as practicable after the conclusion of the fire (and should generally occur within 6 weeks of the fire). All members of the BFMC must be encouraged to attend.
- 6.3 Any organisation/agency that does not have a member on the BFMC but which was significantly involved in the fire must be invited to attend.
- 6.4 A BFMC must hold an after action review at the end of each bush fire season and provide a report to the RFS Commissioner via State Operations for consideration.

7 Annexures

- A. Template – BFMC Plan of Operations
- B. BFMC Pre-Season Checklist
- C. Minimal Impact Suppression Guidelines
- D. Operations Coordination Manual

8 Related Documents

- State Bush Fire Plan
- Bush Fire Management Committee Handbook
- RFS Incident Management Procedure 4.06 Conducting an Operational Debrief and Debrief Recommendations