



BUSHFIRE CRC

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2011 - 2014



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INTRODUCTION

The Bushfire CRC conducts research that enhances the management of the bushfire risk to the community in an economically and ecologically sustainable way.

Following the completion of the initial seven-year grant period, the Bushfire CRC received funding for a further three years for a specific research program related to the findings of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

Positioning for the centre post this funding period is now a priority in the move towards an Australasian Fire Research Institute [the Institute].

THE CHALLENGE OF PRIORITIES

These circumstances present a unique set of communications challenges, as all stages of the funding cycles must be considered simultaneously with messaging and marketing activities targeted accordingly.

1. The continued distribution and utilisation of the significant outputs of the first seven years is a priority for the Bushfire CRC. Successful application of the research findings or outputs must be done in collaboration with the stakeholders and end users and other appropriate audiences. Effective delivery of these practical outcomes will demonstrate the value of the Bushfire CRC, and help to gain ongoing support for its work in the move towards an Institute.
2. The Bushfire CRC extension program has introduced a new set of research activities. Stakeholders need to be updated on and involved in the new activities and their applications, and understand the benefits participation offers and the ongoing contribution that is expected of them. Establishing and managing relationships is critical to making all participants a part of the Bushfire CRC culture.
3. The Australasian Fire Research Institute is the successor to the Bushfire CRC beyond its current funding period. It is a priority at this time for the Bushfire CRC to communicate the objectives of the Institute to key audiences in order to gain support, funding and an ongoing research program.

A new communications and marketing strategy (supported by an implementation plan) is essential to guide activities in the current phase of the CRC (2011 and beyond).

The Bushfire CRC is grateful for the assistance of Currie Communications in developing this strategy and plan. This plan complements the Business Plan for the Institute, the Bushfire CRC Extension Strategic Directions 2010-2014 and the Research Utilisation Strategy 2010-2014.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

In order to develop a robust and relevant communications and marketing strategy for the Bushfire CRC and the Institute, Currie Communications undertook a situation analysis in 2010. The audit aimed to provide the Bushfire CRC with a thorough and independent assessment of its current performance in relation to its marketing and communication activities.

The audit involved conducting interviews with internal and external stakeholders and a review of the CRC's current communication and marketing tools.

The interview phase was followed by a workshop with Bushfire CRC staff and a sample of stakeholders to review the findings and gain input into the priorities for the strategy, target audiences, messaging and an appropriate timeline for activities.

From these exercises, the current situation along with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the CRC's communications can be summarised below.

THE SITUATION

The Bushfire CRC operates in a complex and public environment:

- The Bushfire CRC is an independent organisation that serves the interests of all its participants.
- The Bushfire CRC is geographically dispersed with a broad range of partners from research, policy and operational fields.
- The Bushfire CRC research program is diverse and multi-disciplinary, drawing from a range of science and humanities fields.
- The Bushfire CRC is ensuring that the research is utilised firstly by its partners, and secondly, by as broad a cross-section of the industry and community as possible.
- The Bushfire CRC research outputs are relevant to a range of disaster and natural hazard management scenarios, in addition to bushfire.
- The Bushfire CRC is a national entity, both for Australia and New Zealand.
- The Bushfire CRC is international in its reach with researchers from other countries seeking collaborative studies.
- The Bushfire CRC is funded for a defined research agenda until July 2013.
- The Bushfire CRC communications complement the communications programs of its partners.
- The Bushfire CRC seeks to evolve into the Australasian Fire Research Institute with a broad, national, collaborative research program on fire and other emergencies.

[Following is a SWOT Analysis for the Communications of the Bushfire CRC and the Institute. A broader SWOT Analysis is in the Business Plan of the Institute.]

Strengths - what we are good at

- Reputation
- National profile (media, political)

- Sole national bushfire research centre
- Communications products well received - eg Fire Notes
- Engagement of Stakeholders
- Strong partnerships, relationships and networks
- All key players are involved
- Successful events - well attended, high profile
- AFAC connection - access to Group structure and communications channels.

Weaknesses - what could be improved or can limit our success

- Large number of participants/partners - diverse and geographical spread.
- High number of messages - reflecting the broad base.
- Reliant on participants for delivery of information/end products
- Perceived by some as Victorian-focussed
- Agency turnover resulting in inconsistency in Stakeholder Council representatives

Opportunities - what we could use to do better in the future

- Vision of life beyond next three years - a long term fire research institute
- Website improvement - flexible, easy to navigate.
- Three year extension funding means extra opportunity for dissemination of outputs from the initial seven year research program
- Communications with new researchers, new participant organisations
- Growing international profile
- Stakeholders hungry for information

Threats - what might have a negative impact on our future

- Complex policy environment - media and political attention fluctuates with good/bad fire seasons.
- Complex political environment - mix of state and federal priorities
- Growing number of stakeholders makes relationship management more difficult
- Growing number of research outputs to communicate (must create, deliver, share, evaluate, store, find)
- Difficulty in ensuring all communications are relevant and suitable for receivers
- Insufficient communications funding to meet demand
- The danger of over-promising and under-delivering
- Limited funds past June 2013 creates short term thinking.

COMMUNICATIONS GOAL

For the Institute to become a reality the following communications goal must be achieved:

That the Bushfire CRC is regarded as the leading Australasian centre that delivers real-world research to improve our ability to live safely with fire.

COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

- To assure Stakeholders that they have a valuable investment in the Bushfire CRC and should continue with an investment in the Institute.
- To communicate the Bushfire CRC's research outputs to facilitate stakeholder utilisation and advocacy.
- To build the Bushfire CRC's reputation as a leader in fire research among internal and external stakeholders in the move towards an ongoing Institute.

POSITIONING

To realise its goal of the Institute being the leading Australasian centre that delivers research to improve our ability to live safely with fire, the Bushfire CRC must continue to strongly position itself with stakeholders.

The Bushfire CRC is the national bushfire research centre with a high profile in media and political circles. Our research is highly topical and relevant to other aspects of emergency management in natural hazards including floods and cyclones.

The extension funding provides an opportunity to capitalise on the research successes through an effective communications strategy over the next three years, in order to position the Bushfire CRC strongly for life after the funding term as the primary research body for managing the threat of bushfires and other natural hazard emergencies.

All communications and marketing activity, from presentations to events to printed materials, should reflect the brand attributes of the Bushfire CRC. The brand attributes are:

- Authoritative
- Considered
- Credible
- Creative
- Energetic
- Intelligent
- Scientific
- Accessible
- Networked
- Relevant

PRINCIPLES

Some specific principles guide the communications and marketing activities of the Bushfire CRC and the Institute.

- **Reputation is uppermost.** All communications and marketing activities must enhance the Bushfire CRC's reputation and demonstrate its leadership in fire research.
- **National focus.** While some activities are targeted to regional issues or particular stakeholders, the Bushfire CRC and the Institute strive for a national perspective.
- **Links between funding periods.** Communications for the three year period (2010-2013) are underpinned by the achievements of the initial research program and positioned according to the vision of a long-term Institute.
- **Feed the stakeholders' appetite.** All communications must provide stakeholders with information that they want and need, in order to ensure all stakeholders support and value the ongoing need for the Bushfire CRC.
- **Online presence.** The Bushfire CRC must have a leading presence online and will make all outputs and resources available electronically where possible and appropriate.
- **Two-way communication.** Communications must include two-way with mechanisms to provide and listen to feedback incorporated into communications and marketing activities wherever possible.

KEY MESSAGES

It is critical that the Bushfire CRC has accurate and effective messages for its partners to promote ongoing research in the Institute. Partners need to understand the role of both the Bushfire CRC and the Institute and how they directly relate to them.

Guiding key messages

Specifically, the key over-arching messages for the Bushfire CRC in transition to an Institute are:

- The Bushfire CRC will evolve into the Australasian Fire Research Institute with a broad, national, collaborative research program on fire and other related hazard emergencies as determined by funding stakeholders.
- The Institute is a **centre** of leading national and international fire research and knowledge.
- The Institute is an inclusive **network** of stakeholders from fire management and related industries and from research organisations that pursues a coordinated research program.
- The Institute is a **resource** that links research and knowledge to practice.
- The collective benefits of a collaborative national research program outweigh the individual benefits of jurisdiction-based research by individual organisations.
- Australasia needs to commit ongoing support to the search for new knowledge on how communities can safely live with the threat of bushfire and other related natural hazard emergencies.

Tailored key messages

For Stakeholder Council

- The Bushfire CRC is delivering outcomes now that are improving our ability to live safely with fire and other related natural hazard emergencies.
- More knowledge and tools are being delivered over the next three years.
- The Institute needs your support and action to deliver research outcomes and to maximise the benefit to stakeholders.

For fire and land agency partner staff

- The Bushfire CRC has tools and resources to assist you in managing bushfires and other emergencies and communicating with your communities.
- Knowledge gained through the Bushfire CRC's research has improved safety for people fighting fires.
- You need to participate in utilising the research and share your experiences.

For research organisations (university partners)

- The Bushfire CRC supports high quality research subject to a peer review process that encourages publication in the highest quality journals.

- The Bushfire CRC has changed the landscape of bushfire and emergency management research in Australia, increasing profile and investment.
- The Bushfire CRC has delivered research outcomes which are now being implemented by industry.
- Bushfire CRC researchers and postgraduate students have unparalleled access to the fire and emergency services industry for access to data, for networking and for advice.
- Your learning and teaching profile will be strengthened by engaging in bushfire education.

For Bushfire CRC researchers

- The Bushfire CRC has changed the landscape of bushfire and emergency management research in Australia.
- The researchers are the backbone of the Bushfire CRC.
- Bushfire CRC researchers and postgraduate students have unparalleled access to the fire and emergency services industry for access to data, for networking and for advice.
- Bushfire and emergency management research is now well supported by agencies and government, and has a strong future.

For the public/community (Highfire areas/specific research areas/broader community)

- The Bushfire CRC is improving the community's ability to live safely with fire and other emergencies.
- The Bushfire CRC is working with every fire and land management organisation in Australia and New Zealand.

Federal/State Government (Ministers, Dept Heads, Advisors)

- The Bushfire CRC is improving our ability live safely with fire and other emergencies.
- The Bushfire CRC has delivered research outcomes that are now being implemented by industry.
- The Bushfire CRC is a national centre that includes all the key agencies in bushfire management.
- Individual states and agencies are directly benefiting from the Bushfire CRC.

AUDIENCE

TABLE 1. TARGET AUDIENCES

The Bushfire CRC must communicate with a range of audiences for different reasons. Table 1 identifies the primary audiences and provides guidance on what the CRC wants them to think and do as a result of interacting with the CRC. All these audiences are important but, as resources are limited, effort must be directed where it makes the most impact. Table 1 gives a suggestion of the priority of audiences.

Audience		What we want them to think/feel about us	What we want them to do as a result of interaction with us
A	Stakeholder Council	Valuable Performing well Has good governance Is long-term	Deliver, act/do, support Take and disseminate information within orgs Be actively involved Continue funding Be advocates within agencies
B	AFAC Fire and land agency partner staff and volunteers	Feel involved, part of it Relevant Critical	Use tools Support and apply the research appropriately Be advocates for research – acknowledge and share successes Employ students and researchers
C	Research Institutes - University partners - Universities	Credible Prestigious Desired	Use CRC as a resource Use research in education Disseminate information within orgs Be advocates
D	Bushfire CRC researchers	Loved, supported, part of a team Supportive Valuable, vital	Become future leaders Stay in the industry Contribute Be advocates Support students
E	Public/Community - High fire areas - Specific research areas - Broader community	Research being done for their benefit Worthwhile	Support the CRC Use website as a source of information
F	Emergency Management Fire industry Fire volunteer associations Local Government	Bushfire CRC are leaders and experts	Attend the trade show Provide funding Partners in tool development Commercialisation opportunities
G	Related industries (Water, wine, tourism, agriculture, power, forestry, telecoms)	Valuable Relevant	Funding Partners in research Use the tools
H	CRC board	Believe goal Believe strategy is right Think strategy well implemented	Advocates Make communications strategically critical
I	Federal/State Government - DISSR, Attorneys General, Ministers, DAFF, PMC.	Value for jurisdiction Understand CRC role	Come to CRC for information, advice Provide funding Be advocates

TOOLS & TACTICS

The Bushfire CRC has used a wide range of tools and tactics to communicate its message and promote its products.

Existing tools and tactics that should be continued include *Fire Update Newsletters*, *Fire Notes*, *Fire Australia* magazine, annual report and individual stakeholder reports.

Below is a list of recommended core tools and tactics to supplement or replace existing activities. Most of these are applicable to multiple audiences however some have primary targets. A summary table is included below. An implementation plan maps the rollout of the tools and tactics.

Communications initiatives

New phase brochure

A simple four-page document that explains the new research has been produced and should be kept updated with regular short-run reprints. This can be used in a range of stakeholder communications, including meetings and events.

Achievements publication

The Bushfire CRC has many success stories in terms of its research being taken up by fire agencies. Many have already been written up in *Fire Australia* and other publications. These are being compiled in a colourful achievements publication to demonstrate how much the Bushfire CRC has achieved in its first phase, and set it up well as a credible long-term investment/partner and a critical part of the fire industry.

Website

The website has excellent content and has been reorganised better to make information more accessible. This is becoming increasingly important as the Bushfire CRC accumulates more research publications and knowledge transfer products. With the update now completed, the website should be promoted to stakeholders as a full repository of resources and the best place to see the progress of the new research projects. Google Maps could be incorporated to demonstrate the geographic spread of the projects and the areas to which the projects are applicable. This would emphasise the national nature of the Bushfire CRC.

Case studies

Case studies could be written to demonstrate how the research is being taken up by the fire industry. These can then be used for media, in publications, on the website and to present to stakeholders. Case studies can also be presented in simple display folders to federal and state politicians, emphasising the case studies pertinent to their constituencies.

Media plan

The Bushfire CRC can capitalise on the topicality of its research by identifying three or four stories on the research and case studies per year for the new phase. Devising a media plan will assist the CRC to identify opportunities and targets for media coverage. The media plan would also include promotion of events.

Stakeholder Charter of Responsibility

A simple Charter of Responsibility for Stakeholder Council members should be developed to emphasise their responsibilities in information dissemination back to their organisation. A small card with key points could be produced using powerful imagery (perhaps in a hologram card) as a reminder.

Structure/content of Stakeholder Council meetings

There are two key communications issues related to the Stakeholder Council. These are i) the inconsistency/high turnover in representatives attending and ii) a lack of understanding as to whether the stakeholder attending are disseminating the information back through their organisations. A “carrot” rather than a “stick” approach is required as it is important to keep individuals on-side and engaged with the CRC and not make them feel overburdened by their obligations.

Stakeholders should continue to be invited to host Stakeholder Council meetings at their own organisations. This provides a greater sense of involvement and ownership of the meetings, a chance to highlight “local” projects and people, a commitment to being a truly national centre, and a fresh location and agenda for each meeting.

Four steps are recommended to improve the efficacy of information dissemination by stakeholders attending the Stakeholder Council:

- i) At the beginning of the meeting, clearly state the expectations for information dissemination;
- ii) At the end of the meeting, clearly state the two or three actions (“Stakeholder To Dos”) required from stakeholders coming out of the meeting;
- iii) One or two months post-meeting, allocate someone to personally call each Council Member (or substitute) who attended to check on progress of the requested actions, and seek feedback on whether the CRC can assist in any way with this; and
- iv) At the following meeting, introduce a feedback/reporting mechanism to confirm that actions have been taken, or identify any barriers that may have prevented this.

Stakeholder communications managers’ session

Communications managers are an important conduit for CRC message delivery and should be cultivated. In recent years a pre fire season briefing on CRC activities and projects has been held for end user communications managers to raise the awareness of the research underway, the implications of research findings, and the researchers with the expertise. Another meeting of the stakeholder communications managers is recommended mid-year to reinforce messaging, relationships and the Bushfire CRC’s communications strategy. This would be the basis for an ongoing two-way communication flow.

Communications statements on bushfire research

To support the communications efforts of partners, update the existing communications statements for partner organisations. Prepare a list of key messages and contact details for head office spokespeople. This will support the stakeholder communications managers’ session described above.

Audio visual materials

Video is an accessible medium for fire agency staff. More research outcomes should be presented via short video clips, either online or in DVD format. Existing video content can also be compiled and made available to agency staff and the public. This can also support industry training and public forums.

Events - Partner AFAC with Professional Development Program

AFAC has developed a program of professional development events to promote opportunities for interaction, new thinking, and the adoption of new knowledge across the emergency services sector. The Bushfire CRC will partner with AFAC in this mutually beneficial initiative.

Events - Roadshow to fire and land management agencies

Create a simple 'roadshow' to showcase the top (five?) research outcomes/tools/products to fire agencies. Involve the CEO or research leader and any relevant scientists. They can present to agency staff to show how it impacts on them and their practices, including how to extend the learnings to other emergency type events. Content can be tailored to specific agencies/states. The new direction for the CRC can be explained as part of this. Incorporate Stakeholder Council representatives and communications managers. This initiative may be combined with individual agency or regional conferences or events.

Events - Roadshow to research institutes

Possibly in parallel to the activity above, a 'roadshow' to key high level personnel (eg DVCs, Deans, department heads) in participating research institutes by the CEO and a key state fire agency representative would help to build relationships and recognition for the CRC amongst the academic partners. Emphasis should be on the goal of delivering high quality science for the benefit of society. The new direction for the CRC can be explained as part of this. Incorporate Stakeholder Council representatives and communications managers.

Events - Morning tea with the researchers

In conjunction with the activity above, arrange a series of on-campus informal get-togethers with the CEO and fire agency representative with researchers. This provides an opportunity for researchers to network and build relationships. PhD students especially appreciate this sort of access to the CEO and senior fire agency staff.

Events - Tailored/targeted community outreach

Identify the top five high-fire/research areas where the Bushfire CRC can have strong impact. Conduct a community outreach activity in each area. Work with external groups to co-brand community events. Try to 'piggy back' on another community event, such as the local show or fire information days. Where appropriate, use the 'touch and feel' elements from the National Science Show display and video and poster displays.

Communications skills

Good presentation skills are vital to communicating the results of research in a meaningful way. Identify individuals, researchers and managers, who could benefit from presentation training and arrange training days.

Media skills

Identify individuals who are likely to be involved with the media and ensure they have adequate skills and confidence to perform well. Media training will impart the skills required.

Fundraising

A fundraising plan for the Bushfire Research Fund is required. Potential donors need to be clearly identified. While the general public is not the primary target audience, the fund needs to build some profile and momentum in appropriate places if it hopes to attract some serious investment. The Fund needs to be driven by a small group of people from the Bushfire CRC executive and stakeholders. This

should be supplemented with external expertise and possibly a Patron or a number of nominated influential people.

Opportunities with the ABC

Historically the ABC has been very supportive of the Bushfire CRC, specifically through the annual conference, community forums, and research news. Its new status as a participant provides opportunities for engagement and leveraging this relationship. Set up a meeting with the ABC to discuss opportunities for the new phase.

Branding

It is important that all Bushfire CRC activities and events are clearly identified as such. The Bushfire CRC has a strong brand presence, which includes a familiar logo, a suite of publications with consistent style and a range of corporate clothing and stationery. This should be maintained in all future activities. Other elements that could be enhanced with branding include signage in partner offices, banners and flags, fireground and field research PPE and safety wear, and co-sponsored events with partners.

Bushfire CRC lapel pins

High quality lapel pins are available for Stakeholder Council, Board and key personnel of the CRC (eg executive team, program leaders) in recognition of their contribution and participation. This can be worn to formal events and meetings. The pins can also be presented by the CRC to researchers, agency members or others in recognition of a noteworthy contribution as appropriate. They should be worn by staff at appropriate occasions.

ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS VEHICLES

Publications

Journal	Fire Australia, quarterly Profiles of major research projects to the broader fire industry
Fire Update Newsletter	Blogs from CEO and managers Succinct summaries of ongoing research projects. Emailed regularly to Bushfire CRC partners Accessible to all online
Fire Notes	Research output and outcome summaries Emailed regularly to Bushfire CRC partners as part of research transfer Accessible to all online
Corporate brochure	Overview of all research and activities.

Annual Report Template version for Australian Government. Designed version for all audiences.

Flyers/brochures General (research/program overview)
 Specific - as needed, (HighFire, Research Utilisation, Events)

Partner publications Ensure a presence in appropriate partner publication
 Newsletters, magazines, brochures.

Online

Bushfire CRC Website Updated with all activities of the Bushfire CRC - news, events, research, research utilisation, education.

Partner websites Develop a presence on partner websites - links to Bushfire CRC site, articles on research, pages on programs.

Other Use third party sites to promote activities and reach a wider audience - Facebook, You Tube, etc.

Media

Media placement Articles, programs, interviews across all modes of media - newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, online - that reach our target audiences

Media relations Develop ongoing working relationships with key media that match the breadth of Bushfire CRC research

Branding

Corporate image Develop and implement consistent branding across all Bushfire CRC activities, publications, clothing and other items.

Templates Develop and promote branded templates for all publications - Fire Update newsletter, Fire Note, poster and slide presentations, online pages

Events

Industry Conferences - AFAC/Bushfire CRC, CRCA, other industry related, fire managers research workshops, partner events, launches, other relevant events

Community Research forums in areas relevant to Bushfire CRC research and/or in bushfire prone areas. Work with partners in Government and agencies.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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