

Mind the policy gap: planning for fire risk and emergency management in the context of climate change

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MIND THE POLICY GAP—PLANNING FOR RISK AND UNCERTAINTY

Fire and emergency management are a whole-of-government responsibility. Mainstreaming fire and emergency management across policy sectors is therefore critical, particularly in the context of climate change. However, recent experience in Australia suggests that coordination in this area is lacking, including in the planning sector. A policy gap therefore currently exists in planning for fire risk and emergency management.

OBJECTIVES

Project objectives are to identify leading practice in strategic and statutory planning for fire risk and emergency management, and barriers to mainstreaming fire and emergency management into urban and regional planning.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology includes a literature review, case studies and a national roundtable of stakeholders.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The research will identify leading practice in planning for fire risk and emergency management, to inform policy and practice. Key outcomes include journal publications, presentations, workshops, development of an education module and a final project report for stakeholders.

Closing the policy gap

“land use planning that takes into account natural hazard risks is the single most important mitigation measure for preventing future disaster losses (including from bushfires) in areas of new development”

(COAG National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management 2004)

“The planning framework and subsequent planning decisions, as currently applied, do not attach sufficient importance to the risk of bushfire and the potential threat to people’s lives in bushfire-prone areas”

(Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission 2010)

What can urban and regional planning do?

Planning for fire risk and emergency management is critical in the context of climate change. An integrated urban and regional planning approach is currently developing new approaches to managing significant areas of risk in this regard, including urban growth. These new approaches also help to define some general principles that sit behind all planning systems, including for fire risk and emergency management—while still acknowledging important local differences at the state and territory level. These general planning principles will therefore be relevant across jurisdictions.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Why is mainstreaming fire and emergency management into urban and regional planning critical? How has this area been integrated into strategic and statutory planning processes to date? What are the critical areas of risk currently facing planning for fire and emergency management? Is it possible to take a more risk management approach to this area in the context of climate change? What represents leading practice in planning for fire risk and emergency management? Does current planning education take account of fire and emergency management, and is there professional planning capacity to respond to projected extreme weather events in the context of climate change? Does strategic and statutory planning for fire risk and emergency management include community engagement and communication objectives?

RESULTS TO DATE

An integrated planning approach to fire risk and emergency management is being developed and will be critical.

NEXT STEPS

Future research includes case studies in the ACT, Victoria and Tasmania to audit strategic and statutory planning responses to fire and emergency management, with extensive engagement with stakeholders.

