

LIVING WITH FIRE ON THE LAND

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Aims:

- What relationships do landholders in new rural landscapes have with bushfire?
- What factors are significant in influencing these relationships?

Objectives:

- Critically evaluate the concept of local environmental knowledge in natural resource management literature
- A postal survey of landholders to establish types and levels of engagement with bushfire management
- In-depth field-based interviews with landholders to identify processes and pathways by which relationships with bushfire is generated and applied in new rural landscapes
- Participant observation

New Rural Landscapes (NRL)?

- Rural areas experiencing population growth due to their proximity to major urban areas and their high amenity value
- Rural areas where the more traditional rural population is ageing/declining and urban migrants are purchasing land, often subdivided farmland

Project Relevance:

- Despite the recognised bushfire hazard in many new rural landscapes, little is currently known about how local environmental knowledge about bushfires is produced and/or shared amongst diverse landowners and how this influences the dynamics of NSW RFS brigades and local bushfire management

Natural Resource Management (NRM):

- NRM is important in NRL as these areas often sustain natural resources that are: strategically important (water supplies), threatened (native bushland) and scarce ('prime' agricultural land)
- Bushfire is significant in NRM because:
 - it poses a risk to life and property
 - it is an agent of environmental change
 - it has an important ecological role
 - of its cultural significance in shaping Australian lives past and present



Preliminary Survey Results:

- 16% response rate (347 surveys)
- 164 interview volunteers (47%)
- 69 NSW RFS members/volunteers
- 244 give annual donations to the NSW RFS

Cont. Demographics:

- Strong move from urban to rural areas
- Significant landholder changeover in past 30 years
- Majority live permanently on their rural property
- Majority value space and privacy over local sense of community

Cont. Bushfire Preparedness:

- Majority (66%) consider bushfire before moving to a rural area
- People tend to think their property is less at risk than their local area as a whole
- Minority (30%) have bushfire fighting experience
- Majority (56%) have not prepared a Bushfire Action Plan
- Majority (65%) plan to stay and defend their property regardless of their level of preparedness

Cont. Local Opinions:

- "It can now affect us personally (no longer just a news item)."
- "Seeing at least three fires within 10 years created awareness."
- "Having experienced 2001 fires I know we can't fight nature."
- "I've learnt a lot. City farmers don't know much. Myself included."
- "I should clear more but I regret destroying natural bush."
- "I have areas which need attention but I don't have the machinery or the knowhow."



- "I am more worried now due to the lack of controlled burns from farmers. The "Greenies" have seen to that."
- "It's tougher now to talk to other people about how it should be managed."
- "Bureaucrats in offices in Sydney make decisions on what happens out here and those decisions are fundamentally wrong as they don't live here."
- "Fire Chief's think they own my lot and no burning off - that's what they think."

