

BUSH FIRES, PLANNING AND CONTRASTING LANDSCAPES

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The occurrence and impact of catastrophic fires is growing exponentially with the twin challenges of climate change and the expanding urban edge. Climate change is increasing the number of high temperature bush fire days, and the growth of the urban edge is increasing the homes and properties at risk.

Planning can help mitigate bush fire hazards through strategic decisions about locating development, and site specific measures to reduce risk exposure. For example, high risk places to avoid locating development include the top of ridges and steep slopes in forested areas. Within subdivisions, the inclusion of perimeter roads provide greater separation from direct flames and radiant heat, as well as access and operation space for emergency services.

Better planning is an established recommendation of the inquiries that follow major bush fires. However, recommendations are not always implemented because of other values and goals, such as addressing housing shortages. Finding a way to match seemingly conflicting priorities may be possible through broadening our perspective to be time deep, engaged with knowledge diversity, and encompassing a more integrated understanding of the pervasiveness of fire.

Our research program includes considering planning and bushfire management in case studies from four jurisdictions – Molonglo, ACT; Batemans Bay, NSW; Katherine, NT; and, Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. To date, our review of the intersection of planning and bushfire management in these four jurisdictions has identified key barriers for better practice. Two critical barriers are:

- The use of zoning to identify areas of bush fire risk, which keeps our attention on site specific matters within those zones, rather than considering whether the actual type of development is appropriate for the zone;
- The gap in scale between state or territory bush fire plans and policy and local bush fire planning, as well as a lack of connecting the plans across local jurisdictions.

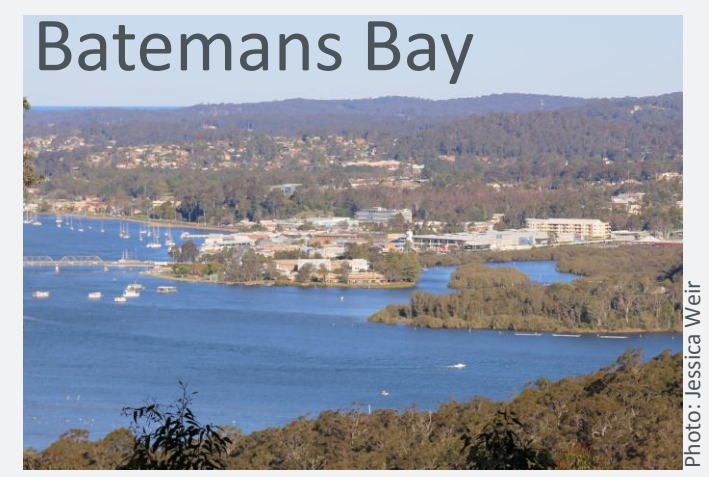
Other important barriers identified include: failure to prioritise bush fire risk, lack of attention to strategic questions, difficulty in connecting across land use sectors, inconsistent implementation of plans, and limited use of knowledge diversity to foster innovation. These findings will be tested through our case study research, which will be a series of focus groups with decision makers primarily at the local and regional level.

Better regional planning offers some remedy to these emergent limitations, however a broader conversation needs to be had about where we place our subdivisions, infrastructure, towns, and other developments. In many ways the most effective long-term contribution of land use planning is to be part of, and to provide advice for, this broader conversation with our political decision makers.



Northern Territory

Photo: Luke Taylor



Batemans Bay

Photo: Jessica Weir



Molonglo

Photo: Jessica Weir

