

# EXAMINATION OF STAY OR GO POLICY

Our goal is to enhance community safety and resilience.

A fundamental element of Australia bushfire safety is the emphasis on staying and defending your property or leaving early.

Our aim is to identify potential impediments to implementation and to suggest improvements.

## THE ISSUES:

We have identified issues and are examining them to establish their reality and importance. Some areas are complete and work has commenced on most others. Refinement of these issues are ongoing.

- Support from published research? YES
- The legal context makes the policy problematic: NO  
That bushfire authorities do not support the policy – VARIABLE BEING CLARIFIED
- What is the policy trying/expected to achieve? (By different stakeholder groups) Are the aims conflicting? COMMENCED
- Expectations of stay or go held by householders and officials do not match. COMMENCED
- People believe that their homes can survive a bushfire. If they don't then is outside or the car safer? COMMENCED
- People believe that their actions can protect their homes (self-effectiveness). If people don't think they can make a difference they won't try. COMMENCED
- Advice or warnings to implement household stay or go action are satisfactory. COMMENCED

### The message:

- That people find the message ambiguous (confusing or contradictory);
- People who don't want to, or cannot realistically, defend their properties may find that the "go" option is not viable.
- There are important gaps in both content and coverage of information on the approach.

### The people:

- Those at risk do not support the approach;
- That high levels of community capacity and resilience are vital to proper implementation of the 'stay or go' policy - Underway by Josh Whittaker.
- People are not mentally prepared to stay.
- Do we understand the decision-making process? Underway by Sarah Chapman.
- People have trouble not evacuating when faced with danger.

## OUTPUTS TO DATE:-

### The Law of Evacuation: Summary

– Rebecca Manson

### Prepare and stay or leave early – a review of the policy's development

– Nina Roberts, Jessica McLean & John Handmer

### Canberra: A Study on Response

– John Handmer & Mae Proudley

### North Eastern Victoria 2003: Stay or Go?

– Amalie Tibbitts

### Evacuation as a normative response to fire (unpublished)

– Jessica Maclean



"It wasn't too long before we decided that we had better get out of there. Going was a difficult decision to make. It seemed as though the worst might be over as a lot of the trees and bushes had gone." – Canberra 2003  
[www.abc.net.au/news/indepth/features/items/766029.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/news/indepth/features/items/766029.htm)

'Age was also revealed as a major factor in people being able to survive wildfire; 69% of the thirty-two civilian deaths on Ash Wednesday in Victoria, were aged fifty years or more.' (1994, John Nicholson, [www.communitysafety.com.au/papers.htm](http://www.communitysafety.com.au/papers.htm))

"I was in the river with my dad, my mum, my uncle, 10 cows and a dog for about three hours...we made our way home only to find that our house was still standing, which was amazing." – Black Friday, 1939  
[www.abc.net.au/blackfriday/oral/oral\\_margaret\\_manson.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/blackfriday/oral/oral_margaret_manson.htm)

'It was so scary...the radio was saying 'Stay with your home, protect your home', but Mum wouldn't let us go back to the house. All Mum wanted to do was get me out of the smoke so my asthma wouldn't get really bad.' – Emily Bickerdyke, Age 10  
Months: 2, 2003; How did the fire know to get here? Canberra's bushfire - January 2003, [canberra.com.au](http://canberra.com.au)

## Case Studies

### CANBERRA:

- Main urban interface case;
- Have completed a round of interviews and collected data on losses [draft report - confidential];
- Follow-up enquiries are focused on staying or evacuation; and the social and economic impact of the fire.

### USA – SAN DIEGO FIRES

- A major urban interface fire with compulsory evacuation.
- There was a significant death toll.
- Aim is to study the factors surrounding evacuation and lost lives in a different context as a way of gaining additional insight into the stay or go approach.
- Initial fieldwork is planned for July 05.

### NORTH EAST VICTORIA:

For the stay or go project we have completed preliminary interviews with agency (CFA) personnel, local government officials and a few community members. Focus groups with community members in the northeast and East Gippsland are underway. In-depth interviews with agency personnel, local government and community will begin in July.

### EYRE PENINSULA: (with Project C7)

- A large scale survey of households affected by the 2005 bushfires has been completed.
- We are ready to begin a follow up series of face to face interviews.



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