



Your strong and independent
voice for livestock producers

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State Bushfire Coordination Committee

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Re: Draft State Bushfire Management Plan 2021 - 2025

Livestock SA appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the development of the State Bushfire Management Plan 2021 -2025. Overtime there have been many bushfire reports, enquiries, and plans. We implore that this current review is actioned.

Livestock SA represents and promotes the interests of beef cattle, sheep, and goat producers in South Australia. It currently has over 3,500 member businesses, spread throughout the State. Many of our members were impacted by the December 2019 – January 2020 bushfires. Whilst South Australia was only about 5% of the area burnt nationally, the impact on agriculture generally, and livestock production specifically, was much more significant in our state. For example, about 75% of the livestock lost nationally was in South Australia. Many enterprises face years of recovery and rebuild.

Livestock SA recognises the high value of the Country Fire Service (CFS) and its volunteers. The CFS works in extreme conditions and whilst it can be easy to be critical, every fire presents widely variable behaviour, and it is difficult to make the best decision in every circumstance. The bureaucratic nature of the CFS, however, can be a hindrance to modern firefighting. There must be good incident management, but also timely on ground activities.

Livestock SA's top priorities for bushfire management in South Australia over the next 4 years include:

Hazard reduction on public land.

The Department for Environment and Water / National Parks & Wildlife Service must be encouraged to interact with adjoining landholders with regards to hazard reduction and the creation of fire breaks, both on the perimeters and within parks and reserves.

Strategically placed breaks, in combination with the early use of equipment in native vegetation, would lessen the risk of major fire outbreaks on public land. Local Government also has a role to play in ensuring that people have undertaken their required hazard reduction activities on their properties.

Some of our most precious natural environmental assets have suffered badly in the recent fires, particularly on Kangaroo Island. It is important that the Government reviews issues such as fire breaks, controlled burns and selective grazing within some park areas. Management of parks must assume bush fire risk and respond appropriately. We need to re-visit planning rules, reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, and develop better linkages between National Parks, the CFS and other stakeholders, including farmers.

Improved communication. Communication was a problem in the 2019 Kangaroo Island fires. To back burn in a fire you need approval from the incident controller. That is really restrictive. The incident controller may not understand the area like locals do. It would be beneficial if the head of the local CFS could approve actions such as these. That would be more practical and faster. Clear communications about responsibilities for hazard reduction and asset protection are also paramount. Not only the requirement to do it, but the consequences for having put no obvious effort in.

Better preparedness.

Most farmers have a good understanding of their bushfire risk status and act accordingly. They can assess fuel load potential risks, and they use their knowledge of local weather patterns in their daily operations. Those who do not have these abilities would benefit from encouragement to better understand their situations. Codes of practice and Fire Ban information can be useful.

Although there has been improvement in the following areas there is still much more to be done.

- Fire management. Farmers have always struggled with central command providing weather reports that do not at all reflect local conditions.
- Fire water management. Too often fire trucks arrive at a property, pour enormous amounts of water on the fire, then sit and wait for an hour or more until the tanker arrives. Volunteers are trained to do that, so it is not their fault, but there is an opportunity to develop an appreciation of conserving water use where it is scarce.

The following suggestions would help farmers to better prepare their property/business for the bushfire season:

- A skilled fire prevention officer conducting on-farm asset assessments (priority regions first).
- Recognition and adoption of local knowledge. People with knowledge of local conditions should be the go-to contacts in any emergency, and the locals all know who they are.

Native vegetation management.

The approval system to manage native vegetation and to undertake hazard reduction activities on property is clumsy, slow, and hard to navigate. The process takes too long, and most farmers want to do the job when the time is right, not when the permit is in hand. Once more, the person on the spot nearly always has the best judgement and knowledge to get the job done.

Clearing of roadside scrub/native vegetation along fence lines.

It costs approximately \$10k-\$15k to replace burnt fencing and landowners are wearing the full cost of that along on the roadside. Not being able to clear more than a metre is incredibly restrictive as it is not possible to get a dozer through to maintain the fence line. Landowners do not have a chance to save a fence line that close to the native vegetation. Fences that have wider clearance of vegetation can be more easily defended and repaired.

Farm Fire Units.

Livestock SA strongly requests that the CFS does not put unnecessary restrictions or rules on farm fire units (FFUs). FFUs are a tremendously powerful force, supporting the CFS during the fire and mopping up. Many small farm fire units are often the first to arrive, and last to leave, long after the CFS appliances have gone. This contribution is rarely acknowledged but incredibly important. They are often able to get into areas that the CFS units find difficult.

CFS Equipment.

The severity of the recent fires really tested the equipment of the CFS. Feedback we have received would indicate that there is a diversity in the quality of equipment between and within CFS brigades, ranging from fantastic to poor. No doubt this will be a common theme raised during this consultation, and the Government will be informed as to the issues. It is best for CFS volunteers to

speaking to this issue. Reversing cameras on fire trucks would also make it a lot easier and safer to reverse and escape quickly in an emergency.

Aerial Support.

Given the extent of the 2019-2020 fires aerial support was tested. There is no doubt that planes play a vital role, and the mix of big and small is also important. This mix and what plane fleet we need going forward should be reviewed and Federal and State Governments need to work together on ensuring we have the planes needed.

Access following fires.

After each major fire in recent years, we have had problems with non-residents being given access to the fire ground after fires. Livestock SA has discussed this issue several times with SAPOL. The priorities post-fire are lives, infrastructure, and environment. We would like to see 'livelihoods' also given priority. Farmers should be given access to their properties as soon as possible to assist in the management of impacted livestock and evaluate asset damage. In fairness we have been able to achieve access but only after having to contact senior people and not without unnecessary argument.

Blaze-Aid.

Livestock SA acknowledges the great work done by Blaze Aid. This program brings together people wanting to help in an organized manner. We need to ensure that these volunteers have good equipment, so they are both safe and efficient. This is a great resource aiding in recovery, and we need to make sure they are given deserved appreciation and invest in this resource.

Military Forces.

We have heard much gratitude for the work done by the Army. Their efforts are greatly appreciated. There have been comments regarding their lack of understanding initially of the tasks they were asked to perform. Hopefully going forward some of these tasks will be addressed in their training. This is in no way a criticism, more an observation. The army equipment was also a welcome addition.

Kangaroo Island Logistics.

The 2019 fires on Kangaroo Island presented many unique challenges. The 14 km of water provides a real challenge to the movement of people, equipment, and emergency supplies of fodder post fire. Sealink does a great job and are vital to the Island, but the severity of the fires really tested their capacity. There were reports of slow responses by Government Agencies, particularly on Kangaroo Island. This is best addressed by hearing from those affected locally.

Overall, Livestock SA has been satisfied with our dealings with Government Agencies during and since the recent fires. Our organisation is using the learnings from the 2019-20 bushfires to ensure that our future responses offer similar relief for those affected and that our services continue to be well coordinated and accessible.

Livestock SA will continue to support the state bushfire response efforts in conjunction with the CFS as our attention now turns towards the coming summer bushfire season.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Curtis
Chief Executive Officer