

# Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy

**2024-2028**

*A plan for how we manage vegetation on public and private land to reduce the risk of bushfires*



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# 1 Glossary of Terms

**AFDRS:** Australian Fire Danger Rating System. This rating system, introduced in 2022, is consistent across Australia and replaces individual state and territory rating systems.

**APZ:** Asset Protection Zones. Areas cleared around high risk assets including schools and aged care facilities, with the aim of reducing the impact of potential fires to these assets.

**BARRA:** Bureau's Atmospheric high-resolution Regional Reanalysis for Australia

**BMA:** Bushfire Management Area. SA is divided into nine BMAs read more about these via the State Bushfire Coordination Committee website:

**BMAP:** Bushfire Management Area Plan. Each Bushfire Management Area has its own plan, overseen by the Bushfire Management Committee (BMC).

**BMC:** Bushfire Management Committee. A body of representatives from state and local government, fire management authorities and emergency services who make decisions about bushfire management in their region. BMCs report to the SBCC.

**DEW:** Department for Environment and Water. DEW is responsible for the management of conservation parks across SA.

**DIT:** Department for Infrastructure and Transport. DIT is responsible for the management of roads and other major infrastructure within SA.

**RRAMP:** Roadside Reserve Annual Maintenance Plan. Council's schedule for treatment works on public land.

**SA CFS:** South Australian Country Fire Service. This consists of paid staff and volunteers. As a professional organization, CFS are the state hazard leaders in bushfire management.

**SBCC:** State Bushfire Coordination Committee. A state-level committee appointed by the Governor under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005.

## 2 Quick reference guide and key points

### 2.1 What is the strategy about?

**Fire is a part of our landscape and can't be avoided, but together neighbours, community groups, council, businesses, and schools can have a positive impact on our landscape and reduce the risk of bushfires.**

This strategy defines how Council, residents and other agencies can work together to manage these spaces, helping to minimise the negative impacts of bushfires when they do occur.

Adelaide Hills Council would like to thank the community groups including Landcare, CFS volunteers, SA Government agencies, primary producers and fire-affected communities who have contributed to developing this strategy.

Council also recognises the need to work collaboratively and meaningfully with local First Nations communities, who have deep knowledge and connection to the land and understanding of how fire can be used as a land management tool. AHC continues to support cultural burning and fire management programs coordinated by the Department for Environment and Water and the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service.

### 2.2 Why is this important?

The Adelaide Hills Council is located in a high bushfire risk area, and historically has been impacted by many major bushfire events. One of the key characteristics of the area is its abundance and diversity of vegetation, with the Mount Lofty Ranges being one of 15 declared biodiversity hotspots in Australia. Coupled with a high population, this creates unique management challenges.

Other complexities in managing vegetation for bushfire risk in the Adelaide Hills include:

- Mixed demographics, including an ageing population and high level of local tourism
- A dispersed population with a high number of towns over a large geographical area
- Wide variety in property types, from small residential blocks to large acreages
- Tensions between balancing bushfire risk mitigation and biodiversity conservation
- Increasing impacts of climate change on fire danger seasons and conditions
- Implications of vegetation clearance around infrastructure and built assets in line with state planning codes and legislation.

### 2.3 Current plans, priorities and actions

The strategy sets out Council's current operational plans and programs relating to fire mitigation. More detail can be found in Section 3.6, and full program schedules are in the closing section under 'operational appendices.'

The plans include:

- Road Reserve Annual Maintenance Program (RRAMP)
- Asset Protection Zones Program (APZs)
- Fire Track Maintenance Program
- Burning on Private Lands Program (BoPL) *in partnership with DEW*



- Weed control for fuel reduction
- Private property inspections

There are four strategic priorities underpinning the Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy. Each of these is explored in more detail in the relevant section. Key information relating to each of these has been summarised below.

### **Priority 1: Strengthening partnerships with other agencies to foster a landscape scale approach to bushfire mitigation**

Multiple organisations, including local councils, are responsible for contributing to bushfire mitigation. Council has certain obligations under the following pieces of legislation:

- SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005
- SA Native Vegetation Act 1991
- Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- Landscapes SA Act 2019
- SA Local Government Act 1991

Other organisations involved in this work include the SA Country Fire Service, Department for Environment and Water, Department for Infrastructure and Transport, Native Vegetation Council, Forestry SA, and Landscapes SA.

These organisations are represented on regional Bushfire Management Committees (BMCs), which report in turn to the State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBMC). Adelaide Hills Council is represented on the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges (AMLR) BMC.

Collaboration with neighbouring councils is also achieved through the AMLR Cross- Council Bushfire Action Group (CCBAG), established by AHC in 2023.

**Actions relating to this priority can be found in Section 9.1.**



## **Priority 2: Improving education and providing clear direction and resources to the community around vegetation management for bushfire risk**

Managing bushfire risk is traditionally seen as a 'shared responsibility'; however, there is still some confusion about exactly what this means.

Council owns 5% of land in the AHC, with state government responsible for around 17% and the remainder being privately owned.

A set of guidelines has been developed in consultation with the community which outlines who is responsible for what actions in each of these areas:

- Public parks and reserves (Council and state government land)
- Council managed roadsides and road reserves
- Private property
- Fire tracks

These guidelines reflect the obligations of Council and other agencies under the State Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP). They also link to other AHC plans and strategies as outlined below:

- Roadside Vegetation Management Plan
- Biodiversity Strategy
- Emergency Management Plan
- Tree Strategy (under development)
- Verge Policy (for consideration)

**The guidelines can be found under Strategic Priority 2 in Section 6. Actions relating to this priority can be found in Section 9.2.**

## **Priority 3: Utilising latest fire science approaches to assist in balancing bushfire mitigation with biodiversity conservation**

Fire can have significant ecological benefits, and considerable research has been undertaken and is continuing in the field of fire ecology. AHC largely sources information from the following places:

- Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience
- Natural Hazards Research Australia
- Geoscience Australia
- Bureau of Meteorology

Operational works programs are guided by the most up to date science in this area, relating to multiple considerations including:

- Best practise for prescribed burning
- Responding to the impacts of climate change
- Mapping and data collection
- Managing native vegetation post-fire



AHC is also proactive in seeking out examples of best practise elsewhere and applying relevant knowledge and ideas in the work undertaken here. Victoria's [Bushfire Resilience Inc.](#) is one source of information used regularly.

**Actions relating to this priority can be found in Section 9.3.**

#### **Priority 4: Continuous improvement of Council's operational plans in line with best practise approaches**

The Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy is intended to provide a plan for future opportunities and actions, as well as outlining Council's current practices.

A roadmap of priorities is therefore included in the final section of the strategy. Detailed implementation plans have been developed for internal Council use, to ensure these priorities are allocated to appropriate departments and actioned as appropriate.

The strategy will undergo a major review every 4 years, to coincide with AHC's Strategic Plan. The strategy will also be reviewed for general updates annually following the fire danger season, and operational plans will be adjusted as needed.

When a significant fire event has occurred in the AHC area, key staff will also review the strategy to identify any areas that may need further consideration or prioritization.





## 3 Background and Purpose

### 3.1 Message from the CEO

The Adelaide Hills is loved for its natural environment. We choose to live here for many reasons including native vegetation, biodiversity and unique lifestyle. The risk of bushfire is always present for Adelaide Hills residents, but now more than ever, with climate change driving longer and more intense fire seasons in Australia, we want to work with our community towards more effective management of our beautiful landscape.

This strategy is for our community. We've developed it to help you to better understand your responsibilities and ours. It focuses on better managing the risk of bushfires in regards to vegetation and landscapes. The aim is to reduce the negative impacts of fires when they do occur.

Protecting biodiversity and our native vegetation is also important, as it's what makes the hills unique. This strategy outlines how we are working across government and various partner agencies to manage landscapes relating to bushfire mitigation.

We have other programs and policies in place to support preparedness activities and community resilience and I encourage each of you to take responsibility to be prepared for the bushfire season. Take a look at our website for a wealth of resources created for our hills community.

See: [www.ahc.sa.gov.au/recovery-readiness-resilience](http://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/recovery-readiness-resilience)

Council is continually improving and building on our existing fire mitigation programs, and we are proud of the work our teams are doing in this space.

**Greg Georgopoulos**

CEO Adelaide Hills Council

### 3.2 Acknowledgement of Country

Council acknowledges that we undertake our business on the traditional lands and waters of the Peramangk and Kaurna people.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging as the Custodians of this ancient and beautiful land.

Together we will care for this Country for generations to come.

### 3.3 Context

The Adelaide Hills Council (AHC) region spans an area of 795 sq. km, with a total population of around 40,000 residents. One of the key characteristics of this area is its abundance and diversity of vegetation. This includes areas of primary production such as pastures, farmland, orchards and vineyards; as well as areas of native vegetation which have a high biodiversity value. High levels of vegetation can, however, contribute to the impact of bushfires when they do occur.

Historically, the Adelaide Hills have been impacted by many major bushfire events and declared bushfire emergencies. The relatively high population, particularly in peri-urban areas and the hills face zone, creates a challenge in effectively managing future risk.

The [Keelty Review](#), developed in response to the significant bushfire season of 2019-20, found that during that season **extreme weather conditions meant that no level of hazard reduction could have prevented the fires.**<sup>1</sup> This is a vitally important message to anyone living in a high bushfire risk area: **fuel hazard reduction programs are not always enough to prevent the impacts of fire.**

The most effective way to minimize negative impacts is by combining effective fuel load management with education and community preparedness, as well as developing new approaches to bushfire risk mitigation in line with the latest research and best practices.

This strategy sets out how AHC will meet these objectives on an ongoing basis, and how the wider community can support these efforts. While Council has a number of other initiatives and programs in place to support preparedness, the scope of this strategy is specifically around vegetation management, which is a complex area in its own right.

It aims to ensure AHC is playing its part to meet Recommendation 5 of the Keelty Review: **Clarify and streamline processes and educate the community about their roles and responsibilities in managing native vegetation to improve hazard reduction.**

Council staff have engaged extensively with numerous community members, groups, and organizations to ensure this strategy is realistic and achievable. A list of stakeholders who have had input into this strategy is provided in the Appendices. In particular, AHC would like to acknowledge the efforts of their online consultation group of residents and key agency staff, who helped refine the priorities and recommendations and have been heavily involved in developing the shared responsibility tables under Strategic Priority 2.



### 3.4 Aims

The three major aims of this strategy are:

1. To have an informed, empowered and proactive community that understands their rights and responsibilities in effectively contributing to vegetation management.
2. To bring together Council's operational plans and processes related to vegetation management and bushfire mitigation in one place, and to clarify our responsibilities.
3. To ensure Council's approach is effective and expectations of both Council and community are achievable.

### 3.5 Strategic priorities

This strategy sets out an overall direction on how bushfire risk will be managed across AHC over the next four years, including the responsibilities of Council, residents and other relevant agencies.

Both the strategy and the operational plans should be reviewed annually following the fire danger season, with formal review and updates taking place every four years in line with the AHC Strategic Plan.

There are four strategic priorities underpinning the Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy. Each of these is explored in more detail in the relevant section.

1. **Strengthening partnerships with other agencies** to foster a landscape scale approach to bushfire mitigation
2. **Improving education and providing clear direction** and resources to the community around vegetation management for bushfire risk
3. **Utilising latest fire science approaches** to assist in balancing bushfire mitigation with biodiversity conservation
4. **Continuous improvement of Council's operational plans** in line with best practice approaches and using a rigorous ongoing review process

It should be acknowledged that the strategy is designed to be **financially and operationally sustainable**. Council will work with currently available resources in the most effective and efficient way. However, opportunities have been identified to utilise future funding for the strategic priorities above.

We have also identified future opportunities and constraints under each priority.

### 3.6 Overview of Operational Plans

AHC has a number of operational plans and programs in place which contribute to fire mitigation efforts. This strategy brings them all together.

The plans appear in full in the operational appendices (Section 12). A brief overview is also provided here.

#### 1. **Roadside Reserve Annual Maintenance Program (RRAMP)**

The aim of the RRAMP is to reduce vegetation adjacent road corridors to mitigate the impacts of fire and maintain sight lines for road safety. Roads that are included on the RRAMP treatment schedule have been prioritised on the basis of traffic volumes, access and egress, and the connectivity of road systems that provide strategic fuel control breaks in the landscape.

#### 2. **Asset Protection Zones program (APZs)**

An APZ is a specified area surrounding a built asset or structure where vegetation fuel loads are reduced to inhibit the travel of fire and reduce the effects of heat, flame and ember attack. Council has established APZs as part of its works program which it manages on an annual basis.

#### 3. **Fire Track Maintenance Program**

Council manages and maintains a strategic network of fire tracks on both public and private land to support the CFS and state government fire management agencies to implement fire suppression operations.

#### 4. **Burning on Private Lands Program (BoPL)**

AHC supports the delivery of on-ground works through the Department for Environment and Water's BoPL program. Strategic sites identified through the Bushfire Management Area Plan, including both private land and Council reserves, are targeted under this program.

#### 5. **Weed control for fuel reduction**

Council undertakes a number of works programs in order to reduce and prevent heavy fuel loads caused by weeds. These include the Bushfire Fuel Reduction Program, which targets high density weed infestations that are responsive to fire; as well as vegetation monitoring and management in conservation reserves to prevent and control weeds in high quality remnant native bushland, generally in conservation reserves.

#### 6. **Private property inspections**

Prior to fire danger season each year, Council Rangers carry out inspections of private properties across the district and assess fire risk. Properties identified as not being adequately prepared are issued an expiation notice under the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (Section 105F) and are required to take action within 21 days to ensure their property is prepared.



### 3.7 Incorporating Traditional knowledge

Adelaide Hills Council spans across both Kurna and Peramangk Country. We recognise the need to work collaboratively and meaningfully with our First Nations communities, who have deep knowledge and connection to the land and understanding of how fire can be used as a land management tool.

This is an ongoing commitment and would require dedicated staff time to facilitate in order to build relationships and dialogue between Council and traditional owners. This would be done in a strategic way that supports DEW as a lead government agency and would involve engagement with a number of other groups and organisations to ensure a cohesive, landscape scale approach. It may be helpful to draw on lessons from co-management plans that have been successful elsewhere, including the [Blue Mountains<sup>2</sup>](#) in NSW, as well as several [Parks Victoria<sup>3</sup>](#) agreements.

The Kurna seasonal calendar below appears on the Bureau of Meteorology website, accompanied by a list of ways in which the land is managed and can be looked after in each season. For the full list, visit <http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/calendars/kurna.shtml>.



The Australian Fire Danger Ratings System (AFDRS) website contains a series of 'Caring for Mob' posters, which are useful for framing the role of fire in the landscape from a First Nations perspective. The posters can be found at <https://afdrs.com.au/>

### 3.8 Challenges

Many parts of Australia are prone to fire. The way fire interacts with our landscape can be both beneficial and detrimental; and Council does have a role to play in supporting our community to adapt and prepare for the negative impacts.

The challenges in effectively managing fire risk across the Adelaide Hills Council area have been carefully considered in developing this strategy, and actions identified to manage these effectively. Key challenges are summarized below.

#### 3.8.1 Community

There is a unique demographic in the Adelaide Hills, with both an ageing population and 'tree changers' who have moved to the area seeking a new lifestyle. The region also has a strong tourism sector, with regular visitation from people outside the region who may not necessarily be aware of the risk of bushfire. Additionally, there are many residents who commute to the city for work each day and are not always present to enact bushfire plans or prepare their properties on high-risk days.

This creates a need to deliver consistent and clear messaging around residential vegetation management, which responds to the needs of a wide cross-section of the community. AHC also recognises those who are living with disability or personal challenges which may impact their capacity to contribute to property preparation. While Council does currently coordinate some programs for eligible residents through the Hills Home and Community Support team, this strategy recognises that further educational materials could also be developed to provide additional assistance.

An additional challenge is that of absentee landholders- that is, where landowners do not reside at the property they own, and do not lease it to others. These properties are therefore effectively vacant and although the responsibility for fire mitigation lies with the owners, on occasion this obligation is not met and residents may be issued with a 105F infringement notice under the Fire and Emergency Services Act (FES Act) 2005. If the resident fails to undertake the necessary work within the prescribed time period, this work is organised by Council and completed by contractors at the resident's expense.

Council has updated its enforcement policy so that any property owner who has received a 105F notice in the five years leading up to annual inspections will be issued an expiation at first inspection. This is to encourage owners to act more quickly to rectify property preparation issues. Increased education around property preparation is also a current focus for Council.



### 3.8.2 Environment

A key challenge for AHC is ensuring bushfire risk mitigation is balanced appropriately with biodiversity conservation. Healthy native vegetation plays a fundamental role in providing ecosystem services to the greater Adelaide region, including air and water filtration, pollination, and carbon sequestration and storage. There is often some tension between managing risk to life and property and protecting native vegetation and wildlife in line with relevant legislation (see Section 4) and with Council goals and objectives.

For example, many native species (such as *Acacia pycnantha* or Golden Wattle) are fire responsive species which can grow rapidly and contribute to increased fuel loads following a significant fire. However, when these occur in protected areas, for example on road verges under the Native Vegetation Marker System, any clearance works must be undertaken in accordance with the Native Vegetation Act 1991, and often removal is not permitted. Council therefore needs to work with landholders to identify effective alternatives that can reduce their risk. It is also important to address the common misconception that all native species create fuel load issues, as there are some natives (particularly grasses) which can in fact help reduce fuel loads when planted on sites which would otherwise be dominated by invasive species.



Furthermore, it is estimated that only 10% of the original native vegetation of the Adelaide Hills remains today<sup>4</sup>; which means we need to prioritise areas of remnant vegetation for conservation wherever possible. These areas provide vital habitat for a multitude of threatened and declining species that only occur in the Mount Lofty Ranges biodiversity hotspot. AHC will therefore ensure its annual maintenance plans complement areas managed for conservation purposes in line with Council's Biodiversity Strategy and Community Land Management plan.

The impacts of climate change on the fire danger season, and on the intensity of significant fires when they do occur, must also be acknowledged. As outlined in a recent report by Griffith University and the Australian National University, ***'The world is already experiencing 1°C of global warming above preindustrial levels. Projected climate change will further increase dangerous fire weather danger over most of Australia and particularly in south-eastern Australia, with longer and more severe fire seasons, more days of high, very high and extreme fire danger, more area burned, and increased fire control difficulty.'***<sup>5</sup>

**Under Strategic Priority 3, a set of recommendations is outlined to help address this.**

### **3.8.3 Infrastructure and assets**

There are a significant number of nursing homes and schools within the AHC area, which are deemed vulnerable or high-risk assets. Where possible, Council maintains Asset Protection Zones (APZs) of cleared vegetation around these facilities; however it is not feasible to clear around every site due to topography as well as funding and resource constraints. There are also occasionally restrictions relating to the Planning Code which dictates where vegetation can be cleared. We rely on the most up-to-date mapping and simulation technologies available to us to determine where APZs are of highest value.

As part of this schedule, AHC has also incorporated key communication infrastructure, such as mobile phone towers adjacent to Council-maintained fire tracks. It should be noted that telecommunications towers are not generally the responsibility of Council and are usually owned by telecommunications companies and maintained by those companies and by SA Power Networks.

It is important to note that while this strategy is specifically focused on vegetation and landscape management, other measures are in place to protect assets and infrastructure within our Council area. These include planning regulations for new buildings, including Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) ratings; as well as embedding community resilience into our Emergency Management operations and frameworks.



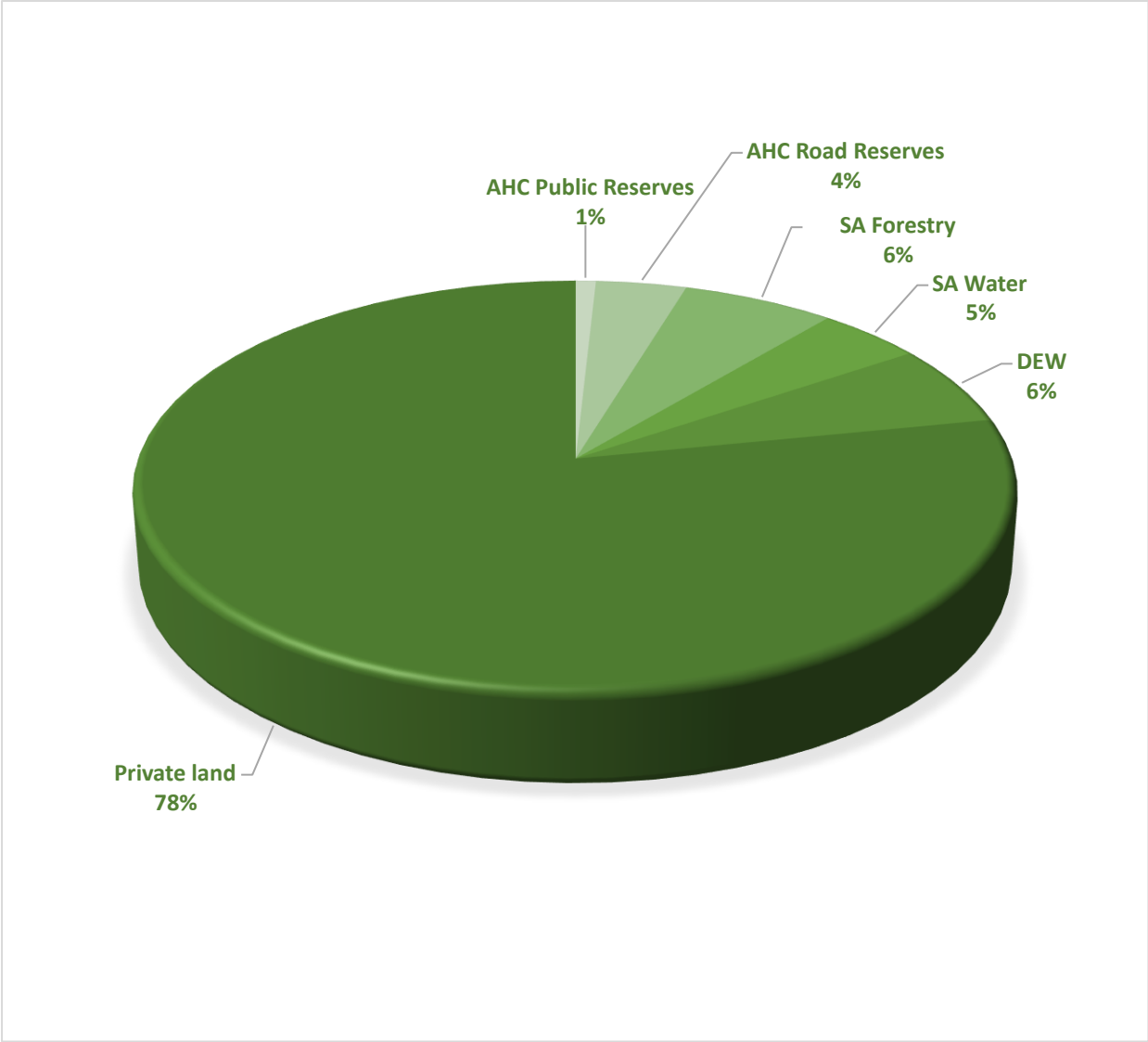
There is some useful information around building in a bushfire prone area on the planning section of AHC's website. Applications within a bushfire risk area must comply with the relevant Building Codes.



#### **3.8.4 Education**

Managing bushfire risk is not solely the responsibility of Council but is shared with other agencies and with the wider community. In the past, there has been a lack of clear information and direction around what 'shared responsibility' looks like in practice. AHC acknowledges its ongoing role in increasing public awareness of these issues, as well as providing transparency in Council processes and operations. Under Strategic Priority 2, a breakdown of responsibilities is provided along with direction on where our community can find further information and assistance.

The following graph (Figure 1) provides a breakdown of land ownership across the AHC, which shows that around 5% of all land in the AHC region is owned by Council. This reflects the need to work collaboratively with state government and private landholders to manage the landscape effectively.



**Figure 1: Chart of land ownership in the Adelaide Hills Council area**

### 3.9 Links to AHC Strategic Plan

The AHC Strategic Plan is reviewed every four years, coinciding with the review dates of the Bushfire Mitigation Strategy. You can access the Strategic Plan using AHC's website. For the period 2024-2028, the following strategic goals align to this strategy:

#### GOAL C: COMMUNITY WELLBEING

C2. A connected, engaged and supported community	C2.4 Increase participation from the broadest range of our community and engage with them to shape policies, places and decisions that affect them
C3. A community that grows together	C3.3 Empower our community groups and leaders...supporting communities to be cohesive in progressing local projects
C4. An active, healthy, thriving and resilient community	C4.5 Take an all hazards approach to emergency management so we can support the emergency services and the community before, during and after disaster events

#### GOAL N: A VALUED NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

N1. Conserve and enhance the regional natural landscape character and amenity values of our region	N1.2 Manage reserves and open space to support the community, whilst balancing biodiversity conservation, resource use and environmental impacts
N2. Recognise the benefits of ecosystem services and improve environmental resilience by reducing environmental impacts	N2.3 Mitigate bushfire risks across the landscape by undertaking fuel reduction activities including woody weed control, maintenance of asset protection zones and educate & enforcement to reduce fuels on private property
N3. Nurture valuable partnerships and collaborations and engage the local community in the management of our natural environment	N3.1 Increase knowledge and environmental awareness within the community through engagement and education
	N3.3 Continue to work in partnership with the Resilient Hills & Coasts region to build Council and community resilience to the impacts of climate change

#### GOAL O: A PROGRESSIVE ORGANISATION

O3. Our organization is financially sustainable for both current and future generations	O3.4 Assess the range and level of services undertaken to ensure they fulfil Council's legislative and strategic intent
O5. We are accountable, informed, and make decisions in the best interests of the whole community	O5.2 Make evidence-based decisions and prudently assess the risks and opportunities to our community before taking action

## 4 Strategic Priority 1: Strengthening Partnerships with Other Agencies

There are numerous other organizations involved in bushfire mitigation and landscape management across AHC and South Australia more widely. It is therefore important that our Council's operations are informed by existing policies and practices, and that we are meeting our obligations under these.

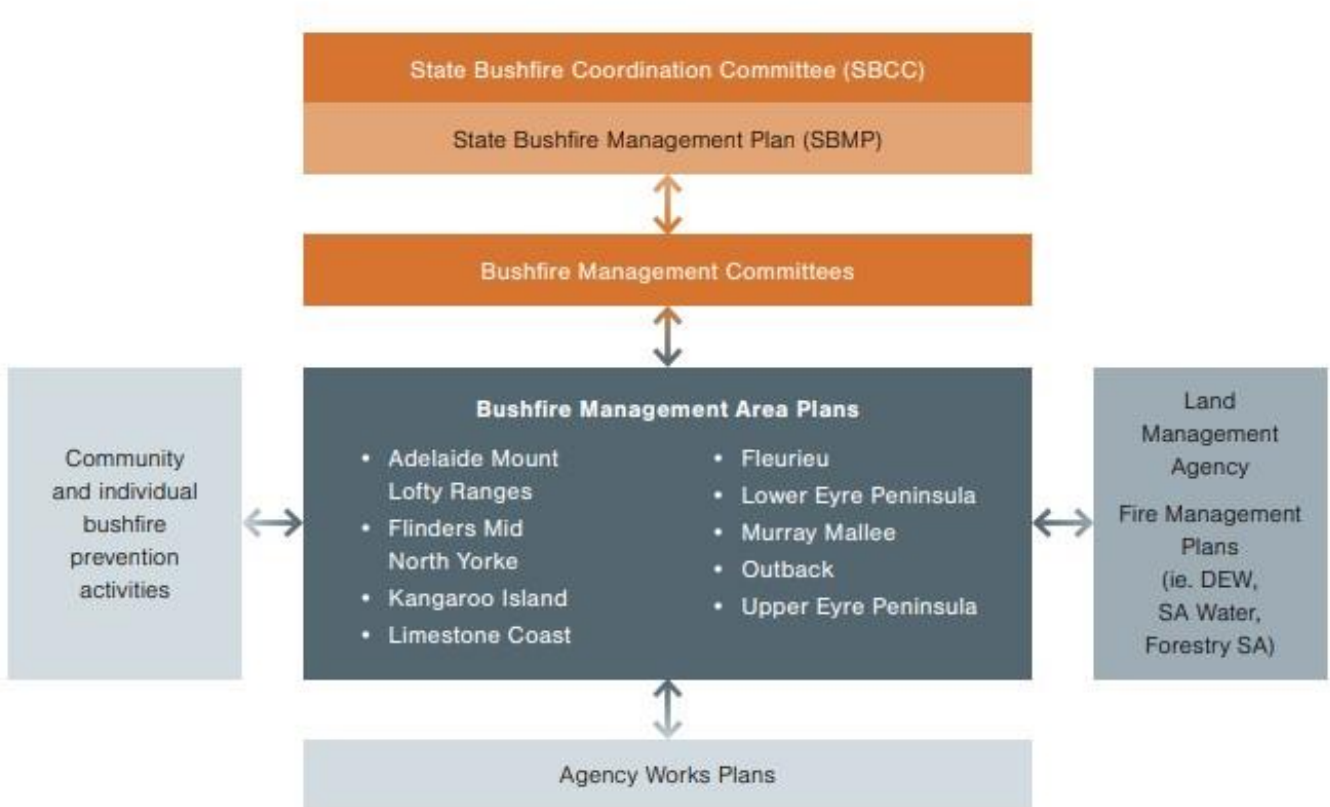
This strategy has been developed in line with several key pieces of legislation, as below.

Legislation	Section	Details
<b>SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005</b>	71A	The State Bushfire Prevention Committee has a responsibility to prepare and review Bushfire Management Area Plans and to oversee their implementation. They are also to provide guidance to individual bushfire management committees.
	105(F)	Owners of private land must take reasonable steps to prevent or inhibit the outbreak or spread of fire through the land.  Authorized Council staff may request in writing that private landholders rectify issues on their properties relating to bushfire preparedness and prevention. Maximum penalty for failing to comply is \$10,000.
<b>SA Native Vegetation Act 1991</b>	33B (1)a	The Minister for Climate, Environment and Water may appoint an officer or employee of the Crown or a local council to be an authorised officer for the purposes of this Act. An authorised officer may enter and inspect any land for any reasonable purpose connected with the enforcement of this Act.
	Schedule 1: Principles of Native Veg Clearance	Native vegetation should not be cleared if, in the opinion of the Native Vegetation Council, it comprises a high level of biodiversity, or it has significance as a habitat for wildlife or includes threatened plants or plant communities.
<b>Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</b>	Part 3, Div. 1 (C 18)	Any action that has, will have, or is likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance requires referral under the EPBC Act. A person must not take action that will have a significant impact on any threatened species or ecological community.
<b>Landscapes SA Act 2019</b>	192 (8)	All regional Landscape Boards must carry out proper measures for the destruction or control of declared animals on public and private lands, including road reserves.



<b>SA Local Government Act 1991</b>	221	A person (other than the council or a person acting under some other statutory authority) must not make an alteration to a public road unless authorised to do so by the council. Maximum penalty: \$5000. This includes removal of vegetation.
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**Figure 2: Summary of key legislation related to bushfire mitigation and vegetation management**



**Figure 3: Frameworks for bushfire management and mitigation in SA**  
 From [SASBMP.pdf \(safecom-files-v8.s3.amazonaws.com\)](#), p2

**AHC works plans are discussed in more detail under Strategic Priority 2.**

Risk analysis within the Bushfire Management Area Plan is determined using several inputs, including:

- Vulnerability of assets and people.
- Vegetation type and its distance from the asset.
- Predominant slope of the vegetation in relation to the asset.
- Access and/or egress to and from the asset.
- Frequency of ignitions in the general area of the asset.

#### 4.1 Links to relevant frameworks and plans

The following documents have been used extensively to guide development of our strategy and future priorities. They provide solid examples of best practice fire management and methodology and should be referred to in future reviews of this strategy.

- Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Bushfire Management Area Plan June 2016
- State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBCC) Bushfire Management Zone Standard and Guidance for Use 2020
- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Fire Management Manual 2022-23
- State Government of Victoria (VicRoads) 2013 Road Bushfire Risk Assessment Guidelines and Risk Mapping Methodology

There are AHC staff representatives on the AMLR Bushfire Management Committee. AHC also works closely with several neighbouring Councils and have developed this strategy to align with their fire management plans as appropriate:

- City of Tea Tree Gully Bushfire Mitigation Framework 2022 - 2026
- City of Onkaparinga Bushfire Management Plan 2020-2024
- Kangaroo Island Fire Management Plan

It should also be noted that there are 11 Emergency Management Zones in SA, each of which has its own Zone Emergency Management Committee (ZEMC). These committees provide emergency management leadership and risk assurance for all emergencies, including bushfires. AHC is represented on the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island ZEMC.

#### 4.2 Current actions

AHC is committed to working with other agencies including the SA Country Fire Service, Department of Environment and Water, the Native Vegetation Council, Forestry SA, Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board, and other state government agencies and community action groups to ensure a shared approach to vegetation and landscape management can be achieved.

One of the methods used commonly by state government agencies is to introduce strategic fuel breaks into the landscape. This essentially involves creating a 'corridor' of cleared or modified vegetation to reduce fuel loads and improve the chances of slowing and containing significant fires. These may be done in many ways, including planting fire-resistant native species in these areas where suitable. DEW's Fire Management Unit is largely responsible for overseeing this, however AHC does play a role in helping to identify and advocate for these fuel breaks as required.

Expanding on existing natural or created breaks in the landscape, such as the Amy Gillett Bikeway, is another effective action that can be taken.

**The responsibilities of Council and the community are set out under Strategic Priority 2.**

As part of a more strategic approach to landscape management, AHC has also initiated a cross-council bushfire action group focused on vegetation management and fire mitigation. The group comprises fire management staff from multiple Councils across the Adelaide Mt Lofty Ranges Bushfire Management Area, and its aim is to collaborate on landscape scale issues such as verge management and fire track maintenance, as well as developing educational resources with consistent messaging across all Council areas.



## 5 Strategic Priority 2: Improving Education and Providing Clear Direction

### 5.1 Local government obligations

According to the State Bushfire Management Plan 2021-25 (SBMP)<sup>6</sup>, local governments are required to undertake the actions outlined below. These actions demonstrate that Council's obligations are largely around prevention and preparedness, as well as communication.

Acronyms are provided here for ease of reading, as they appear multiple times in the SBMP.

Government agency acronym	Full spelling
CFS	Country Fire Service
SAPOL	SA Police
MFS	Metropolitan Fire Service
NVC	Native Vegetation Council
DEW	Department for Environment and Water
DIT	Department for Infrastructure and Transport
SAFECOM	South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission

#### Prevention

- Provide additional public education on high-risk activities during periods of high fire danger (with CFS and SAPOL)
- Issuing of permits to burn during fire danger season (with CFS)
- Annual inspection and compliance notifications (with CFS)
- Communication and information provision regarding native vegetation clearance processes (with CFS, MFS and NVC)
- Communication and information provision regarding the role of public land management in hazard reduction (with CFS, DEW, SA Water, Forestry SA)
- Hazard and fuel reduction burning (in partnership with all other agencies)

#### Preparedness

- Improve preparation and planning of suitable routes to designated locations to reduce risk (with SAPOL, SAFECOM, CFS and DIT)
- Suitable venues or locations identified across the state for Relief and Recovery Centres (with Housing SA, Zone Emergency Management Committees, SAPOL)

#### Response

- Assist in timely activation of relief centres and support for communities impacted by bushfire (with Housing SA and Zone Emergency Management Committees)



## Recovery

- Management of recovery following a bushfire incident to improve and enhance conditions in an affected community (with other agencies)

Council has the following plans and policies in place, in addition to this Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy, which assist in meeting our prescribed responsibilities as well as promoting our region's biodiversity and ecological value.

- Roadside Vegetation Management Framework
- Biodiversity Strategy
- Tree Strategy (under development)
- Verge Policy (under development)

AHC's Emergency Management Plan further outlines how Council undertakes disaster risk reduction activities in regards to bushfires and other natural disasters. These efforts are mainly focused around fuel reduction, education and enforcement of relevant legislation.

AHC is also guided by the following plans from other agencies:

- Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board Pest Management Strategy
- Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board Regional Roadside Weed Control Work Plan
- AMLR Zone Emergency Management Plan

## 5.2 Resident responsibilities

Following the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, a report was produced by Australia's Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre to identify key issues and learnings from the season. The final report clearly highlights 'the need for integrated and holistic responses to risk reduction- ***a shared responsibility between governments, fire and emergency services, businesses and communities at risk***'.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore vital that community members living in high bushfire risk areas are aware of their responsibilities.

Under the Fire and Emergency Services Act Section 2005 S105(F): **'Owners of private land must take reasonable steps to prevent or inhibit the outbreak or spread of fire through the land.'**

Without a clear definition of 'reasonable steps,' there is potential for a lack of action; and this is especially likely when community members perceive that others around them are not doing enough. This is of particular concern in the Adelaide Hills, which contains relatively high proportions of vegetation that are often connected regardless of property tenure. This means the actions of individual property owners can have a considerable impact on those living around them.

This is why it's important to be collaborative in managing bushfire risk, and that those living in bushfire prone areas clearly understand that risk. Council acknowledges that for some time there has been a lack of consistent information about what 'shared responsibility' looks like in

practise. This has led to the development of clearer information for the community to clarify expectations around this.

**This information is set out in the tables in Section 6.**

This information has been developed in consultation with a focus group comprised of residents and other key stakeholders; including the CFS, National Parks & Wildlife and DEW. Collaboration with neighbouring councils has also occurred to ensure consistency.

It is important to note that while Council has its own responsibilities for managing fire risk across the Hills, residents are also expected to be proactive in managing their own land. There are steps everyone can take to mitigate the overall risks to the hills landscape, and those are set out across the following pages.

### 5.3 Our resources and where to find them

Extensive consultation on this strategy has helped identify several recurring themes on which residents have indicated they would like further information. In response to this, the following resources have been developed alongside this strategy. These are available on AHC's website.

- Native Vegetation Marker Sites
- FAQs on our Roadside Reserve Maintenance Program
- How to prepare your property for the fire season
- How to balance biodiversity and bushfire mitigation
- How verges are managed (cross-council collaboration)

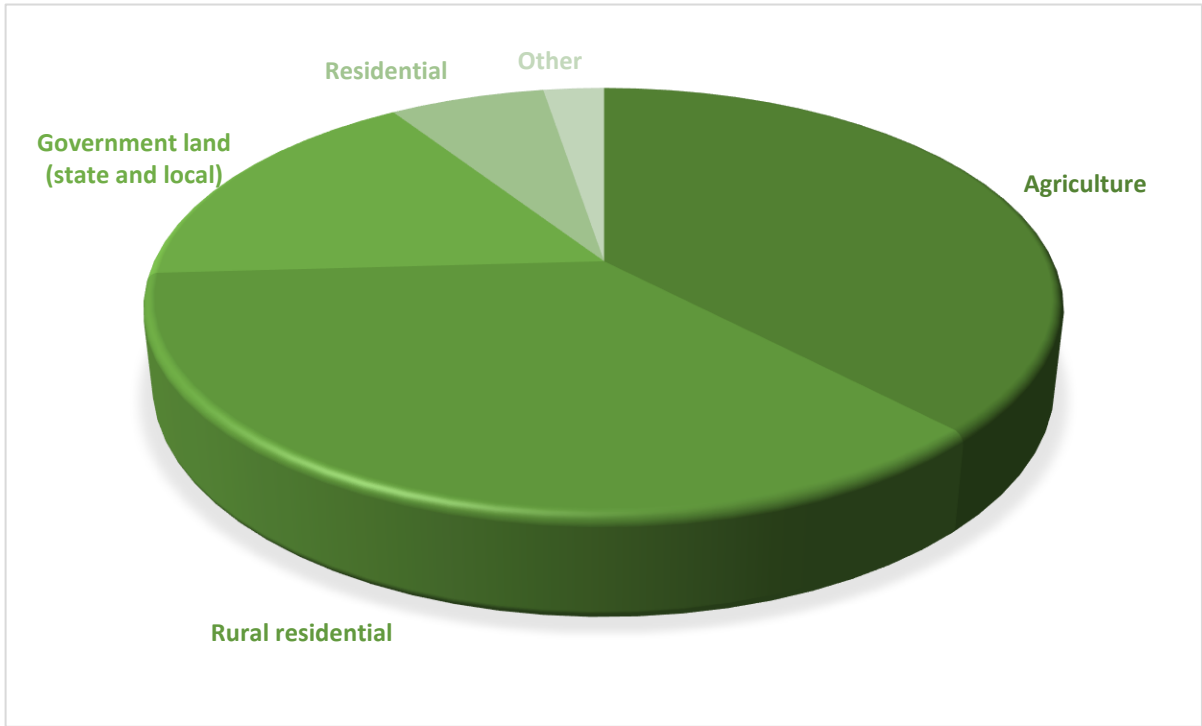
It is recommended that this list be reviewed every 4 years to ensure any new knowledge gaps are filled, and updated case study examples and best practise guidelines can be incorporated.

### 5.4 Summary of responsibilities

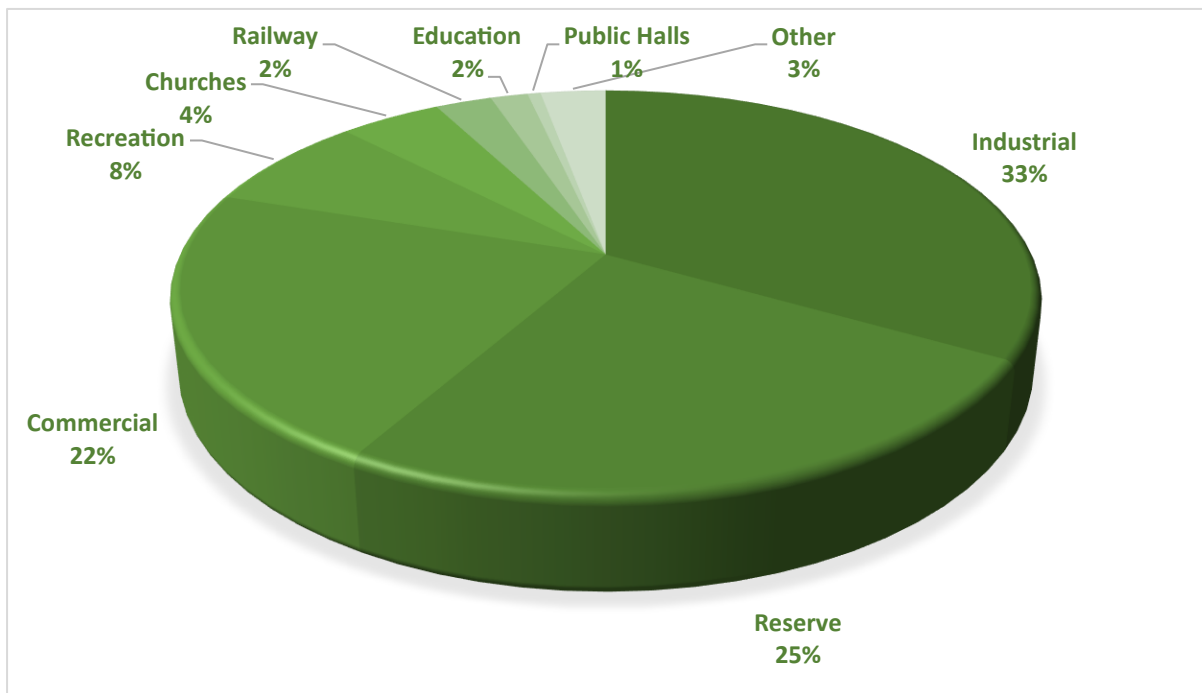
A 2023 report by Resilient Hills & Coasts states:

***Communicating bushfire prevention and preparedness must include a coherent and strong message about 'shared responsibility' (Resilient Hills & Coasts Bushfire and Biodiversity Report 2023 Part C: Discussion and Recommendations)***

The AHC region encompasses multiple different land use types, as shown below. This means that the available information needs to be tailored to ensure all of these land uses are represented.



**Figure 4: AHC land use types by percentage**



**Figure 4.1: "Other" land use breakdown**

## 6 Shared responsibility for different land classifications

This section explains responsibilities of residents, Council and other agencies for different land classifications.

### 6.1 Private property

<b>Responsibilities: Private Property Preparation</b>	
<b>Council responsibilities</b>	<p>Under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (Section 105F), <i>Authorized officers, including certain Council staff, may request in writing that private landholders rectify issues on their properties relating to bushfire preparedness and prevention. Maximum penalty for failing to comply is \$10,000.</i></p> <p>Council has a role to play in clearly informing residents of their obligations according to relevant legislation. Our public-facing resources will be updated regularly to reflect this.</p>
<b>Resident responsibilities</b>	<p>Under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (Section 105F): <i>Owners of private land must take reasonable steps to prevent or inhibit the outbreak or spread of fire through the land.</i></p> <p>This involves clearing a defensible space around your dwelling, clearing away fine fuels in the lead up to fire season, and thinning particularly dense vegetation that is likely to carry fire quickly. Any new buildings on your property, including sheds and carports, may require approval under the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016. See <a href="#">Plan SA Wizard</a> for details.</p> <p>The most important factor in protecting a home is to appropriately manage vegetation within 20m of the building. Further details at <a href="https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/native-vegetation/clearing/fire-prevention">https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/native-vegetation/clearing/fire-prevention</a></p> <p>Residents may at times be requested to clear a fire break on their property, where fuel loads exceed safe thresholds. It's important to note that while fire breaks can slow or halt lower intensity fires, they don't offer protection against ember attack- so clearing a break as a standalone action is not enough to mitigate risk.</p>



	You can find more information at <a href="https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/services/waste-and-recycling/free-green-organics-drop-off-days">https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/services/waste-and-recycling/free-green-organics-drop-off-days</a>
<b>Other agencies</b>	<p>DEW delivers the Burning on Private Lands (BoPL) program, supporting public and private land managers to conduct prescribed burns on private properties identified as containing high fuel loads and providing strategic connectivity of other fuel reduced buffer zones at a landscape level.</p> <p>SA Power Networks conducts tree trimming around and under powerlines in the leadup to fire danger season, on private properties as well as roadsides. For more information, visit their website: <a href="#">Bushfire safety - SA Power Networks</a></p> <p>SA CFS is the lead agency when it comes to community education regarding bushfire mitigation.</p>

### Help: Private Property Preparation

<b>What Council is doing</b>	<p>Council is developing a series of case studies with photographic and visual elements to demonstrate good property preparation and share information on how this is achieved. This will cover a range of different property types.</p> <p>AHC works in partnership with the CFS wherever possible to deliver educational sessions and workshops- including "Bushfire Ready" (both online and in person), Firey Women, and targeted awareness campaigns.</p> <p>To assist with private property preparation, Council offers up to 24 free green waste drop off days per annum. You can check dates on the website here:  <a href="https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/services/waste-and-recycling/free-green-organics-drop-off-days">https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/services/waste-and-recycling/free-green-organics-drop-off-days</a></p>
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<p><b>How Council can help</b></p>	<p>Council's Regulatory Services team can provide advice on regulatory obligations and site-specific requirements as needed. For more information contact AHC on 8408 0400.</p> <p>Council also administers burning permits to help residents with the reduction of fuel loads on private properties.</p> <p>Strategic planting around homes and assets can be a great way to maintain biodiversity and help address fire risk. AHC has a low flammability planting guide that can be used to determine the best native species for your area. Find it here: <a href="https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/environment/ENVIRONMENT-Low-Flammability-species_2020.pdf">https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/environment/ENVIRONMENT-Low-Flammability-species_2020.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Further information</b></p>	<p>For new homes and developments, the clearance of native vegetation may require approval from the Native Vegetation Council. Council approval may also be required for removal of trees with a circumference greater than 2m in some cases. If you are building or developing in the AHC, it is advisable to check with the Duty Planner before proceeding. Call AHC on 8408 0400 and ask to be put through.</p> <p>Property owners wanting more information about the BoPL program can contact DEW fire management staff following the links at <a href="#">Department for Environment and Water - Burning on private lands</a></p> <p>Bushfire Resilience Inc. based in Victoria has a great selection of webinars and other resources about preparing private property. You can browse and watch them here: <a href="https://bushfireresilience.org.au/resource-hub/">https://bushfireresilience.org.au/resource-hub/</a></p> <p>The Climate Wise communities website also has a range of very useful information about how residents can manage their vegetation effectively. You can find it at <a href="https://climatewisecommunities.com.au/">https://climatewisecommunities.com.au/</a></p>

## 6.2 Fire Tracks

<b>Responsibilities: Fire Track Maintenance</b>	
<b>Council responsibilities</b>	<p>There are several different categories of fire tracks, with responsibility for their management falling to various organisations and land managers.</p> <p>While this is a complex space to manage, Council is committed to supporting the community in maintaining fire access tracks and will work closely with the CFS to ensure this is done.</p> <p>Fire tracks deemed to be the responsibility of Council are maintained by Council staff, regardless of the ownership of land they traverse.</p>
<b>Resident responsibilities</b>	<p>Where fire tracks traverse private land, Council does rely on landowners to maintain clear passage where possible, and to report any issues to Council.</p> <p>Council can provide assistance to maintain fire tracks on private property where the track is identified as high priority and the landowner is unable to manage without support.</p>
<b>Other agencies</b>	<p>CFS has its own Group Response Plans which contain information about fire tracks in each area. Any new tracks should complement those which already exist.</p> <p>Forestry SA maintains a network of fire tracks in forest reserves (plantation and native forest) under its jurisdiction.</p> <p>SA Water maintains a network of fire tracks in land under its jurisdiction (including reservoir reserves).</p> <p>DEW maintains a network of fire tracks in land under its jurisdiction (including Conservation Parks and National Parks).</p> <p>The removal of any native vegetation at a distance greater than 5m from fire tracks, is subject to approval through the Native Vegetation Council. This is regardless of who owns the land.</p>

## Help: Fire Track Maintenance

<b>What Council is doing</b>	Council is currently working with the support of the CFS to design an audit process for all fire tracks in the AHC district, and to determine how best to manage them into the future.
<b>How Council can help</b>	If you do have a fire access track on your property and are unable to maintain it yourself, you can contact Council to notify of any maintenance required. Maintenance will be programmed if the condition of the track warrants it. Contact AHC's Technical Officer, Parks & Reserves through council's Customer Contact Centre 8408 0400.
<b>Further information</b>	For clear detail on types of fire access tracks and how they are constructed, visit <a href="http://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/publications/bushfireprevention-constructing-fire-access-tracks">www.landscape.sa.gov.au/mr/publications/bushfireprevention-constructing-fire-access-tracks</a>  You can also refer to Section 5.4 of SAFECOM's fire track guidelines here <a href="https://safecom-filesv8.s3.amazonaws.com/current/docs/fire_breaks_and_fire_access_tracks_2005%20%281%29.pdf">https://safecom-filesv8.s3.amazonaws.com/current/docs/fire_breaks_and_fire_access_tracks_2005%20%281%29.pdf</a>



## Responsibilities: Public Parks and Reserves

<p><b>Council responsibilities</b></p>	<p>Under Section 105G of the Fire and Emergency Service Act 2005: <i>A council that manages land in a bushfire risk area must take appropriate steps to prevent and inhibit fires, and to minimize the risk to property and life.</i> To achieve this, AHC maintains fire breaks, fire access tracks and Asset Protection Zones in strategic areas across the district.</p> <p>Council is also an active participant in DEW's Burning on Private Lands program, where sites containing remnant vegetation are assessed by DEW's Fire Management Branch and prioritised for prescribed burning. Both Council and DEW then participate in an 8 year post burn weed control program to control fire responsive weeds that elevate fuel loads, and to support native vegetation recovery. To provide enough refuge for native animal species, these prescribed burns are often undertaken in small mosaic patches in 10-15 year intervals (depending on recovery) so that the program can be undertaken without serious impacts to threatened and declining species.</p> <p>AHC also undertakes monitoring and control measures for management of weeds that elevate fuel loads in conservation reserves and densely populated areas. These sites are independently assessed every 5 years using the Bushland Assessment Methodology to determine vegetation condition, identify weed outbreaks and infestations, and to attribute weed scores which are used to adjust annual works programs.</p>
<p><b>Resident responsibilities</b></p>	<p>A number of active volunteer bushcare groups assist Council with the management of natural area reserves through revegetation and weed control, as well as site monitoring which allows for early management interventions when issues arise.</p>

<b>Other agencies</b>	<p>DEW has Fire Management Plans for 15 reserves across the Mt Lofty Ranges, 10 of which are located within the Adelaide Hills Council LGA. The responsibility for these reserves rests with state government. See the Fire Management Plans here: <a href="https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/environment/docs/fire-management-plan-hills-face-zoneplan.pdf">https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/environment/docs/fire-management-plan-hills-face-zoneplan.pdf</a></p> <p>Local government has no authority to direct other government agencies to conduct any works on state government or Commonwealth land.</p> <p>Forestry SA has Forest Management Plans for 19 forest reserves, including five (5) Native Forest Reserves, within the Adelaide Hills Council LGA. The responsibility for these reserves rests with state government. To see existing Forestry SA forest management plans, visit <a href="https://www.forestrysa.com.au/forest-management/conservation/native-forest-reserves/">https://www.forestrysa.com.au/forest-management/conservation/native-forest-reserves/</a></p>
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### 6.3 Public parks and reserves

<b>Help: Public Parks and Reserves</b>	
<b>What Council is doing</b>	<p>AHC’s Biodiversity Strategy identifies that approximately fifty Council reserves and Crown land parcels in the AHC are managed for conservation. This involves active revegetation as well as threat abatement measures including pest plant management and fuel reduction burning. The Biodiversity Strategy is available on Council’s website.</p> <p>AHC also coordinates a Vegetation Monitoring and Management Program, where these sites are independently assessed every 5 years using the Bushland Assessment Method to determine vegetation condition, identify weed outbreaks and infestations, and attribute weed scores. Council uses this data, as well as annual contractor and volunteer reports to adjust the annual works program, to prevent weeds that elevate fuel loads from establishing in high quality remnant vegetation.</p> <p>Council has several Vegetation Management Plans for conservation sites, and is also currently assessing opportunities to enhance management options for natural area reserves, through development of formal site management plans where possible. A template is being developed to guide fire management across these sites also.</p>
<b>How Council can help</b>	<p>AHC supports volunteer Bushcare groups with on ground work to complement volunteer activities and goals, green waste collection, partnering in grant projects, equipment and material resources to conduct their on ground work.</p> <p>Council can support initiatives to engage traditional owners from the Kurna and Peramangk Nations to participate in natural area management and potentially incorporate cultural burning practises into prescribed burning programs. This will likely be most effective through partnering with DEW and the Hills &amp; Fleurieu Landscape Board to facilitate delivery of cultural burning programs, following a mosaic burning approach.</p>

<b>Further information</b>	<p>For details on involvement in volunteer bushcare or restoration groups, contact <a href="mailto:AHCbiodiversity@ahc.sa.gov.au">AHCbiodiversity@ahc.sa.gov.au</a></p> <p>To see existing National Parks and Wildlife Service park management plans, visit <a href="https://www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/management-plans">https://www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/management-plans</a></p> <p>To see park management plans from the Department of Environment and Water, visit <a href="https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/park-management/statewide-park-strategies/park-management-plans">https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/park-management/statewide-park-strategies/park-management-plans</a></p> <p>For details on weed control programs across the region, contact <a href="mailto:Hf.LandscapeBoard@sa.gov.au">Hf.LandscapeBoard@sa.gov.au</a></p>
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## 6.4 Roadside verges

<b>Responsibilities: Roadside Verge Management</b>	
<b>Council responsibilities</b>	<p>All native vegetation is protected under the Native Vegetation Act 1991 and may not be pruned or removed without formal approval. Fines of up to \$5000 can apply. Council must comply with this legislation when managing roadside reserves.</p> <p>Council has a Roadside Vegetation Management Framework (RVMF) 2024-2029, endorsed by the Native Vegetation Council, which guides our work on roadsides. The AHC commitment to roadside vegetation is <i>to maintain road traffic safety within legislative parameters while retaining remnant roadside vegetation of high biodiversity value</i>. All Council works conducted in accordance with the RVMF are already approved by the NVC, however proposed works that do not comply with the document will require NVC approval.</p> <p>According to the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (Section 105G): <i>A council that manages land in a bushfire risk area must take appropriate steps to prevent and inhibit fires, and to minimize the risk to property and life.</i></p> <p>Whilst other Councils endeavour to maintain all verges in their district, AHC is in a unique position where this is not feasible due to topography, access restrictions and high levels of vegetation. Maintenance is prioritised based on set criteria, and where possible opportunities are identified for neighbouring Councils to assist with works along shared boundaries.</p> <p>AHC's Native Vegetation Marker sites are assessed every five years to determine vegetation condition and identify weed outbreaks and infestations. Weed scores are then attributed, which Council uses to adjust its annual works programs. The subsequent works schedule is documented in the Roadside Weed Control Program, which is updated annually, targeting weeds that elevate fuel loads.</p>

<p><b>Resident responsibilities</b></p>	<p>All native vegetation is protected under the Native Vegetation Act 1999, and may not be pruned or removed without formal approval. Fines of up to \$5000 can apply. Therefore, any activity on a road verge undertaken by a resident requires permission from Council under Section 221 of the Local Government Act 1999. Application forms are found at <a href="https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/development/roads-and-construction/authorisation-to-alter-a-public-road">https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/development/roads-and-construction/authorisation-to-alter-a-public-road</a></p> <p>Where verges have been identified as containing high biodiversity value, they are included in the Native Vegetation Marker System register and program, and works may only be carried out by Council or their approved contractors. Residents can contact Council’s Customer Contact Centre to request works as appropriate.</p> <p>Any work on roadside verges that are considered to be for amenity value or for general maintenance is the responsibility of the adjacent resident. In most cases, Council approval must be obtained under Section 221 of the Local Government Act 1999. Check the AHC website for details.</p>
<p><b>Other agencies</b></p>	<p>Neighbouring Councils collaborate and exchange information on roads where boundaries are shared. Staff from several Councils in the AMLR region, including AHC, are continually looking at scheduled maintenance works on these sites and assessing how best to share resources and carry out works in a timely and effective manner. Under the Landscape South Australia Act 2019 (Section 194), Landscape Boards are responsible for managing declared weeds on all roadsides regardless of who owns them. This includes Native Vegetation Marker System sites.</p>
	<p>DIT is responsible for maintaining their own roadside verges, but only to within 1.5m of the sealed road edge. The remainder of the verge is technically the responsibility of Council, with mitigation works carried out on those deemed highest priority according to data contained in the Bushfire Management Area Plan.</p> <p>The exception to this is the South Eastern Freeway, which is entirely the responsibility of DIT.</p>

## Help: Roadside Verge Management

<p><b>What Council is doing</b></p>	<p>Council operates three programs to maintain road verges: the Roads and Reserves Annual Maintenance Program (RRAMP), which is focussed on fire mitigation &amp; road safety; the Roadside Weed Control Work Program, which is focussed on biodiversity protection; and the Bushfire Fuel Reduction Program undertaken in Council managed reserves set aside for conservation.</p> <p>AHC has initiated a cross-council reference group with neighbouring Councils looking at best practise management for roadside verges.</p> <p>Council also intends to develop a verge policy outlining our responsibilities and approach to verge management, including the S221 process.</p> <p>According to roadside maintenance plans developed interstate, <i>supporting and promoting leave early messaging should be the key focus, as driving on any road during a bushfire is inherently dangerous.</i> <a href="https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/business-and-industry/design-and-management/bushfire-risk-assessment-guidelines">https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/business-and-industry/design-and-management/bushfire-risk-assessment-guidelines</a> AHC is committed to sharing this message in the lead up to and during fire danger season each year via our website, social media, community education workshops run in partnership with the CFS.</p> <p>Where significant regrowth of native vegetation occurs following a fire event, Council assesses the need for fuel hazard reduction on a site-by-site basis. To preserve local biodiversity, works will only be undertaken where vegetation fuel loads present an unacceptable risk to public safety, or to infrastructure and assets.</p>
<p><b>How Council can help</b></p>	<p>When elevated fuel loads exist, and warrant Council action, mechanical slashing or chemical spraying may be undertaken. Council's approach is to prioritise verges that present the greatest fuel load risk to infrastructure and assets under the RRAMP, and to prioritise verges of highest biodiversity value under the Roadside Weed Control Program.</p> <p>Council will consider waiving the fee of any S221 application based on the nature of proposed works, or if it is proposed to establish revegetation with native species or to undertake woody weed control.</p>

<b>Further information</b>	If you have specific questions around management of a verge adjacent your property, contact Council on 8408 0400.
	According to extensive research by the Resilient Hills and Coasts Bushfire & Biodiversity Group, there is not enough evidence to suggest that roadside vegetation, and native vegetation in general, is exclusively responsible for increasing or decreasing the landscape bushfire risk to life and assets; as fire behaviour is also determined by topography, weather, and environmental conditions. <sup>17</sup>

## 7 Strategic Priority 3: Utilising Latest Fire Science Approaches

There is a large and continuously growing body of research around fire science and ecology. In Australia, fire has always been part of the landscape and when it is understood and managed effectively, it can provide benefits to both the natural environment and the people who live there.

Fire regimes have changed substantially since pre-European settlement, leading to adverse impacts on native plant and animal species from both uncontrolled bushfires and prescribed burning. This includes the impacts of fire events occurring too infrequently, as certain native plants rely on fire to germinate. When fire moves through an ecosystem it effectively clears a lot of undergrowth and allows more natural light in, which improves the nutrient balance of the soil and reduces competition amongst multiple plant species.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the other ecological benefits of fire include:

- With consistent and long term post-burn follow up, invasive weeds can be eliminated, creating improved conditions for native plant species to thrive.
- Native plant seed germination can be triggered by smoke and fire, including native species that have been dormant in the soil.
- Fire can help flush out insects that may have caused damage to the soil and tree roots.

Standing burnt trees with hollows can also provide valuable habitat for native animal species such as birds, bats and possums, while fallen burnt logs create safe havens for small mammals, reptiles, frogs and invertebrates.

Research carried out in 2018 shows 90% of Adelaide Hills and Eyre Peninsula residents surveyed would like to see biodiversity considered in bushfire policy.<sup>10</sup>

### 7.1 Vegetation management principles

There are a range of vegetation management techniques used in fire mitigation. When deciding which ones to apply, it is important to consider not just how to reduce fuel loads; but also how to minimise negative impacts on our natural environment.

Different techniques can also be used for various land uses. For example, grazing stock in a mosaic pattern may be an effective mitigation strategy on agricultural land; whereas road verges are more likely to respond to slashing or spraying (depending on the types of vegetation present).

AHC continues to explore available opportunities to employ other methodologies, such as using goats to graze fuel loads in inaccessible environments, and will document processes and learnings as they arise.

Council's bushfire mitigation operations are informed by the latest available fire science research and best practice. Information is sourced largely from the following places:

- Australian Institute Disaster Resilience <https://www.aidr.org.au/>
- Natural Hazards Research Australia <https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/>
- Geoscience Australia <https://www.ga.gov.au/education/classroom-resources/hazards/naturalhazards/bushfire>

## 7.2 Prescribed burns and cultural burning

There are a number of different types of burns that can be carried out to help manage Council land.

**Prescribed burning** is the planned and controlled application of fire under predetermined environmental conditions (or prescriptions). Prescribed burns are planned to meet specific land management objectives, which are typically focussed around reducing bushfire risk and enhancing ecological systems.

**Ecological burning and hazard reduction burning are both types of 'prescribed burns.'**

Prescribed burns need to be carried out with due consideration for threatened species for which fire is a critical threat. DEW has developed a series of ecological management strategies for these species, which are available online. Species include the southern brown bandicoot, glossy black cockatoo, and Mount Lofty Ranges southern emu-wren.

**Cultural burning** is a contemporary term used to describe the long standing First Nations practice of using fire to care for Country.

According to state government guidelines<sup>11</sup>, which in turn are informed by various research around fire ecology, mosaic burning is one of the most effective methods of achieving both fuel reduction and ecological outcomes. The guidelines also lay out clear flowcharts to assist in deciding whether to conduct prescribed burning based on several factors.

Council's approach under the BoPL program is to conduct cool mosaic burns at 10-15 year intervals, with 5 years of intensive follow up weed control and another 3 years of moderate weed control, before reverting to the standard annual maintenance level. In acknowledgement of the impacts prescribed burns may be having on declining woodland bird populations, AHC also undertakes pre and post burn bird surveys to provide a snapshot of population changes. This provides an indication of burn recovery timeframes, and is used to help guide burn frequency. In general, this approach allows wildlife to move to alternate areas of a reserve while the burnt portion recovers, providing the greatest possible ecological benefit while also reducing fuel loads.





### 7.3 Responding to the impacts of climate change

It is important to note the impacts of climate change on the frequency and intensity of bushfires in Australia. According to a Natural Hazards Australia CRC report into the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20, "**drought and heatwave conditions in the lead up to multiple fires during Black Summer were a key factor in fire behaviour. This demonstrates how vital effective preparation will be in future given shifts in our climate towards more frequent heatwaves and droughts.**"<sup>12</sup>

This is not the only piece of research that demonstrates the need for a more proactive planning approach to vegetation management. Multiple reports on the same Black Summer season show that climate change was instrumental in the size and intensity of these fires, suggesting that 'the magnitude and ferocity of the 2019/2020 fires would have been virtually impossible without climate change.'<sup>13</sup>

Lightning strike is the leading cause of bushfire ignitions in Australia<sup>14</sup> and this may have implications on future fire events too as electrical storms also become more frequent and intense. At any rate, planning must be undertaken for future events recognising that climate change impacts are continuing to increase, and fire is inevitable in the Australian landscape.

Council will be informed by the Resilient Hills and Coasts Climate Change Adaptation Plan<sup>15</sup>, which suggests the following priority adaptation options for local government:

- **Greater investment into community education**, including 'welcome packs' for new residents. This is being explored both through various Redicommunities groups who have developed their own 'welcome pack' templates with Council support, and through the



inclusion of bushfire preparedness information with rates notices in the lead up to fire danger season each year.

- **Improved rates and timeframes for enforcement of Section 105F notices** AHC already has a reasonably short timeframe for residents to action their notices (21 days), recognising the priority that needs to be given to removing excess fuel hazards. In the leadup to the 2023-24 fire season, AHC has changed the way it enforces the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005. Properties which have received a 105F notice in the last 5 years will now be issued with an expiation at first inspection. This is to encourage owners to act more quickly to clean up ahead of fire season.



#### 7.4 Mapping and data collection

Traditionally, local governments have relied on the Bushfire Management Area Plan (BMAP) framework, produced by the SA CFS, to inform prioritisation and scheduling of fire mitigation works.

There are however limitations to these, and there is an opportunity through updated mapping and simulation techniques for Councils to undertake more detailed mapping of fuel loads, vegetation types and predicted fire behaviour. This is an area AHC is currently investigating.

This approach is in line with the work currently being undertaken in other states, as reflected in Recommendation 36 of a NSW Bushfire Inquiry carried out following the 2019-20 fire season:

**‘Recommendation #36: Long-term ecosystem and land management modelling, improved understanding of ecosystem health and impact of bushfire disturbances’.**<sup>16</sup>

Future scheduling of fire mitigation work on public land will be based on mapping and relevant data sets, with the areas identified as higher risk being prioritised for treatment. Council’s fire track network review will also be influenced by this data.

Working with the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges Cross-Council Bushfire Action Group (CCBAG), AHC will also ensure a consistent approach other councils and encourage information to be shared across boundaries. The modelling we are undertaking uses Bureau of Meteorology high-resolution Regional Reanalysis data for Australia to obtain a more accurate picture of fire weather scenarios and the types of conditions we need to consider in our planning. This data is available at <http://www.bom.gov.au/research/projects/reanalysis/>



### 7.5 Managing native vegetation following fire events

Following an uncontrolled bushfire, the recovery of native plants and animals is not only crucial to ensure the health of natural ecosystems, but to improve the wellbeing of impacted communities by demonstrating resilience and restoration of important natural environments.

This was clearly demonstrated after the 2019 Cuddlee Creek fire, when AHC's Creative Recovery program encouraged residents to capture their thoughts and emotions through various media following the fire. One of the strongest themes that came through during this process was the sense of hope that came with the regeneration of impacted landscapes.

After a significant fire event, volunteer groups are often faced with significant increases in member recruitment. This is an area Council would like to support further, recognising the extra workload it can place on existing group members who may also be personally impacted. Options to support volunteer training and administration should be explored.



## 7.6 Best practice examples

Many local government organisations interstate are already doing great work in this area which can inform future operations. Two examples are provided here, with recommendations on how AHC can adopt key elements of each approach.

### **Bushfire Resilience Inc. (Victoria)**

Bushfire Resilience Inc. (BRI) was created by a group of community members from fire-affected areas in Victoria in 2020. It is an independent organisation and is sponsored by Bendigo Bank. The major focus of BRI to date has been the development of a series of webinars assisting residents to understand their bushfire risk and better prepare for fires. A number of experts from various fields have been invited to present during these webinars.

The content of the webinars is relevant to all Australians living in bushfire prone areas, so rather than attempt to recreate it, AHC will look to promote content such as BRI's webinars via social media and other channels in the lead up to fire season each year. We will also continue to review whether any new content has become available through other sources that we can actively promote.

More information is available at [www.bushfireresilience.org.au](http://www.bushfireresilience.org.au)

### **Hotspots (NSW)**

Delivered by the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) of NSW, the Hotspots Fire Project is a training program for both landholders and land managers in NSW. It states its mission as: ***Working with our partners to increase community understanding, confidence and capacity to sustainably manage fire for ecological and First Nations cultural outcomes, whilst protecting life and property.***

AHC could explore ways to support similar initiatives through working with DEW on their Burning on Private Lands program. It is advised that where possible, Council could increase its level of support to assist this program in reaching more private landholders.

More information is available at [www.hotspotsfireproject.org.au](http://www.hotspotsfireproject.org.au)

## 8 Strategic Priority 4: Continuous Improvement of Council's Operational Plans

It is important for Council to regularly assess the effectiveness of its operations; therefore the following review process will apply to the Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy.

### 8.1 Review process

This strategy will undergo a **major review** every 4 years, in line with AHC's Strategic Plan. Strategy reviews will be undertaken by Fire Prevention Officers and their relevant managers.

As part of the major review, responsible staff will consider the following:

1. Is there any information, including links to other resources, within the strategy that have dated? Can they be updated, or do they need to be removed?
2. Can we refer to more current research and reviews than what appears here?
3. Are there any major operational changes or resourcing constraints that impact our ability to deliver all aspects of this strategy? If so, how can they be managed across relevant departments to continue to achieve the strategy objectives?
4. Where 'future opportunities' listed have been realised and are no longer relevant, can they be removed completely? Or do they create an opportunity for further work in this area?

The review process will take into account the updating of AHC's Bushfire Mitigation Task List.

All major reviews of this strategy should be done with reference to the following guiding documents:

- Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Bushfire Management Area Plan
- State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBCC) Bushfire Management Zone Standard and Guidance for Use
- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Fire Management Manual
- State Government of Victoria (VicRoads) Road Bushfire Risk Assessment Guidelines and Risk Mapping Methodology

**The strategy will also be reviewed for general updates annually** following the fire danger season, and operational plans will be adjusted as needed.

An implementation plan has been developed for internal staff use, capturing the following actions in the roadmap (Section 9).

When a significant fire event has occurred in the AHC area, key staff will also review the strategy to identify any areas that may need further consideration or prioritization.

## 9 Roadmap of future priorities

### 9.1 Opportunities: Strategic Priority 1

- Council will work to establish more robust partnerships with other agencies including SA Water, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the DEW Burning on Private Lands program (BoPL). This includes prioritising resourcing arrangements to support DEW in delivering the BoPL, particularly regarding follow up weed control for 8 years following burning.
- AHC will continue its involvement in the Cross-Council Bushfire Action Group (CCBAG) over the coming years, actively identifying opportunities to build on and improve current practises at a wider scale.
- Through the CCBAG, Council will advocate to the AMLR Bushfire Management Committee for more streamlined approaches to landscape scale issues such as fire track mapping and maintenance.
- Council is supporting landholders following bushfire events, by sharing information about managing post-fire regrowth of colonising species such as Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*, as well as expanding current operational programs on public land to manage mass germination following fire.

### 9.2 Opportunities: Strategic Priority 2

- AHC works closely with the CFS Region 1 and 2 Community Engagement Unit to identify key risk areas for targeted engagement each year. It is intended to support this partnership on an ongoing basis, and where possible contribute time and resources to enhance community education in these areas.
- Council will work with the support of its internal communications team to schedule regular reminders on private property preparation to be shared on AHC social media platforms. This information will include links to low flammability planting guides, as well as tips for verge management and targeted information for managing different land types (agricultural, hobby farms, orchards, bush blocks etc.)
- A detailed audit of our existing fire track network is recommended to determine the tracks of highest strategic value, map the classification of all tracks in the district, and identify opportunities to add or remove tracks as appropriate. Funding was secured through SAFECOM to carry out this work in 2024.
- Council will continue to explore opportunities to inform residents of fire mitigation works happening near them, through the expanded use of technologies including MyLocal Services App and StoryMaps.



- Recognising the need for greater awareness raising of fire risk and preparation across the community, Council staff are looking to produce a series of videos (to be shared on the AHC website and social media) discussing property preparation tips for a variety of land types.
- AHC has a role in actively identifying opportunities to create strategic containment lines within the council area, and advocating to DEW for these as appropriate.
- AHC recognises the need for a verge policy to clearly set out the S221 process and where permits for verge maintenance are and are not required by residents. This policy is currently being considered for development.
- Council is rolling out a series of roadside Visual Messaging Signs to inform residents of bushfire season dates and fire danger rating information, as well as encouraging private property preparation.
- AHC is currently undertaking a trial to explore the potential expansion of kerbside green waste collection, to enable residents to better prepare their properties in the lead up to and during the fire season.

### 9.3 Opportunities: Strategic Priority 3

#### 9.3.1 Prescribed burning

- Prescribed burning is generally conducted by state government rather than at Council level, with the SA National Parks & Wildlife Service being the lead agency in this space. However it is recommended that AHC work to identify opportunities to collaborate on prescribed burning in the future in areas where Council and state government land meet, for example adjacent to National Parks and Conservation Parks. It is also important to expand our support of prescribed burning activities on private land wherever possible, largely through assisting DEW with the BoPL program.
- We do need to consider that ***'the resilience of some biodiversity assets can be improved with the use of ecological burns, at the right scale and timing, however this requires strong evidence that the species, or ecological community, will respond favourably to fire.'***<sup>17</sup> This means we will need to act on the best available information in designing any such programs in future.
- AHC would like to explore ways to support DEW in conducting cultural burns where possible. This needs to be done through ongoing and respectful relationships between those involved, and will involve formalised and well-resourced approaches to facilitating the work, which has been crucial to the success of such partnerships in other local government areas as summarised below:

***'It is critical to empower First Nations to contribute to current bushfire management and ensure that the decision or approach to undertake Indigenous fire management is solely that of the First Nations groups of the RH&C region'*** (Resilient Hills & Coasts Bushfire and Biodiversity Report Discussion & Recommendations, p3)

### **9.3.2 Responding to climate change**

AHC will consider a range of options to allow us to better adapt to the likelihood of more frequent and intense fire conditions due to climate change. These include:

- Promoting small-scale burns on public land adjacent to private property where feasible. Landscape scale, inter-agency coordination would be required to ensure their location, size and intervals support ecological outcomes. This is in line with AFAC's recommendation that these types of burns can not only reduce bushfire threat, but also to maintain and revive biodiversity affected by changed fire regimes associated with European settlement over the past 240 years.<sup>18</sup> It also reflects the findings of a report into prescribed burning on Kangaroo Island, which found that risk mitigation burning was more effective in areas at the interface of vegetation and buildings, rather than in large areas of bush.<sup>19</sup>
- Working in close collaboration with the CFS to report on real-time curing of grasslands to inform declaration of fire danger seasons.

### **9.3.3 Using technology and best practise examples**

- Mapping and simulation technologies are constantly evolving and offering more detailed insights into fire behaviour and management techniques. AHC Fire Prevention staff will continue to seek out the most appropriate technologies to assist with scheduling mitigation works.
- Council would like to consider how to support and expedite the training and induction of new volunteers involved in Bushcare. This would aim to address the challenges that often arise following bushfire events, where an influx of new volunteers can place further onus on fire-affected community members attempting to carry out these works. Training is currently available through the Bush for Life program for a \$55 annual fee.
- Council will actively promote resources from [Bushfire Resilience Inc.](#) in the lead up to fire season each year, as well as seeking and promoting other sources of information to assist residents with property preparation.
- Wherever relevant, AHC resources will reflect the CFS position statement on large trees in relation to bushfire risk, which states that ***'mature trees located within 20m of a building, if maintained correctly, do not pose a significant fire risk to a building'***<sup>20</sup>.

It is hoped that this will help assist residents to better manage large trees on their properties.

- AHC is currently developing a template for fire management to be incorporated into existing and future vegetation management plans for Council-owned parks and reserves. This involves measures such as increased weed control, prescribed burning on adjacent land (potentially through the Burning on Private Lands program), as well as creation of buffer zones through planting fire-resistant species around park perimeters.

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## 11 Appendix 1: Evidence and engagement base

Development of the strategy has been informed by the following sources of information and best practice examples:

- Hotspots Fire Management program NSW
- Bushfire Resilience Inc. Victoria
- Case studies developed by the SA Resilient Hills & Coasts Bushfire and Biodiversity group
- Natural Hazards Research Australia (Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC)
- NRM Regions Australia Bushfire Recovery Knowledge Hub
- NSW Nature Conservation Council
- Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience

Council has engaged with the following groups and community organizations to ensure this strategy is realistic and achievable:

- SA Country Fire Service staff and volunteers
- Adelaide Hills community members (via public consultation)
- Department for Environment and Water
- Forestry SA
- Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board
- The University of Adelaide
- Adelaide Hills Community Action Bushfire Network (AHCABN)
- Cuddlee Creek and Cherry Gardens Recovery Groups
- Local Landcare groups and Friends of Parks
- Fire Management staff from neighbouring Councils within the AMLR region
- Nillumbik Shire Council, Victoria (which has similar landscape and demographics to AHC)



## 12 Operational Appendices

### 12.1 Bushfire Mitigation Task List

Council staff from multiple departments are involved in fire mitigation activities throughout each year. The Bushfire Mitigation Task List provides an overview of these activities, as well as responsible staff and timeframes.

The task list can be found here:

[Bushfire Mitigation Task List 2023-2025 FINAL.xlsx \(ahc.sa.gov.au\)](https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/Environment/AHC-Bushfire-Mitigation-Task-List-2023-2025-FINAL.xlsx)

### 12.2 Annual Roadside Reserve Maintenance Plan (RRAMP) schedule

Council maintains priority roadside verges according to the RRAMP. A copy of the current works schedules can be found below. There is one schedule for works undertaken by certified contractors, as well as a northern and southern works schedule conducted by internal staff.

<https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/Environment/AHC-RRAMP-schedule-Contractor-works.pdf>

<https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/Environment/AHC-RRAMP-schedule-northern-region.pdf>

<https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/Environment/AHC-RRAMP-schedule-southern-region.pdf>

### 12.3 Fire Track Maintenance Program (under development)

When completed, this program will be available on our website. Expected completion date is 30 November 2024.

### 12.4 APZ schedule

Council maintains identified Asset Protection Zones (APZs) on an annual basis. A copy of the current works schedule can be found here:

<https://www.ahc.sa.gov.au/assets/downloads/Environment/AHC-Asset-Protection-Zone-Register.pdf>