

Introduction

Crews responding to Bushfires in heightened periods should be aware of the strategies and tactics associated with managing bushfire. Application of burning operations as an incident combatant strategy can be applied in the following tactics:

- **Backburn**- a fire started intentionally along the inner edge of a fire control line during fire operations to consume fuel in the path of a bushfire.
- **Burning Off**- Generally, setting fire to areas of unwanted vegetation such as rough grass, slash and other fuels, e.g.- hazard reduction burning.
- **Burning Out** -To intentionally light fires to consume islands of unburnt fuel inside the fire control perimeter so as to remove fuel, widen the control line and thus stop the progression of the fire.

Crews should have a fundamental understanding of the terminology surrounding burning operations and consider the impact these operations may have in their local area during the current conditions.

Commissioner's Intent Regarding Burning Operations

As you are aware the unseasonal dryness, combined with above average fire weather conditions, has significantly increased the bushfire behaviour and risk. Backburning and/or burning out are always inherently high-risk strategies for indirect fire containment or protection of assets, and even more so now given the changed bushfire conditions.

Please let me be clear, **backburning is not banned**. Rather it is QFES intent that all backburning and/or burning out operations require an options analysis and a well determined plan to be authorised by the Regional Manager RFS or Commander Regional Operations. The process ensures that increased risks associated with these operations are:

- balanced appropriately with broader fire strategies
- has the required allocation of resources
- is considerate of critical timings, and
- any broader considerations.

It also means the decision, responsibility and any consequences sit within this delegated authority, rather than with crews on the ground. QFES goal is to have as little fire on the ground as possible in challenging conditions.

QFES management is enormously appreciative of our volunteers' and staff knowledge and expertise on the fire ground, and do not wish to hinder their work. While backburning and burning out has been used effectively throughout this event, QFES management want to make sure decision-making is kept at the appropriate level in support.

Approval for Backburning or Burning Out Operations during the 2019/20 bushfire season

The approval process will remain in place and will be reviewed when the current bushfire risk environment changes. The following table provides a reference for approval to undertake burning operations under normal operations and as conditions escalate.

Condition	Approval Process
Local Forest or Grass Fire Danger Index is not expected to exceed 25 (Very High) and winds are expected to remain below 25 km/h during the incident.	Incident Controller may approve the burning operation
Local Forest or Grass Fire Danger Index is expected to exceed 25 Very High and winds are expected to exceed 25 km/h and /or a Local Fire Ban is in place for the local government area	Regional Manager RFS or delegate/ OnCall RFS officer and or FRS DRO via Firecom may approve the burning operation
Incident Control Centre is established (Regional Operations Centre not activated)	Regional Manager RFS and or the FRS DRO in consultation with Incident Controller may approve the burning operation
Regional Operations Centre is activated.	Commander Regional Operations or delegate may approve the burning operation

The following exemptions to this approval process apply:

- Imminent threat to lives, infrastructure, or assets where **backburn** is the only viable option for crew protection
- Crews working in remote areas that have no phone or radio connectivity, where the imminent threat prevents those crews from traveling to establish communications to request approval

At incidents where these exemptions have been exercised, the following must occur:

- Direct communication with the landholder or land management agency responsible for the land parcels to be affected.
- Establish communications via phone or radio as soon as practicable to provide SITREP and Options Analysis.
- Maintain a decision log including incident priorities, options analysis, decisions made, and actions taken.

Additional Resources

Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990, Part 6, Section 53

Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990, Part 7, Section 83

Regional Operational plans – QFES Gateway

Operational Guide 11- QFES Gateway

Bureau of Meteorology – www.bom.gov.au

