



Office of
Environment
& Heritage

NPWS Cultural Fire Management Policy

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1 NPWS Cultural Fire Management Policy

1.1 Introduction

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) recognises the importance of working with Aboriginal communities to manage NPWS reserves. Aboriginal communities are custodians of their culture and Country. NPWS recognises Aboriginal people's use of fire is important to enhance and protect natural and cultural values; to express and maintain culture, kinship and identity; and to continue to share knowledge and practice. NPWS is committed to partnering with Aboriginal people to undertake culturally informed burning and community (low risk) cultural burning on NPWS reserves.

1.2 Definitions

Cultural fire management is defined as the involvement of Aboriginal people in fire management. The term cultural fire management is a broad term, which covers both of the terms below. That is, it can cover the full spectrum of Aboriginal community involvement in fire management from consultation with communities about their needs and values in NPWS fire management activities to community presence on the fire ground for a low risk cultural burn.

Culturally informed burning is defined as any burn with cultural burning objectives and Aboriginal community partnership in planning and approval. Culturally informed burning may not always have Aboriginal people involved on the fire ground.

Community (low risk) **cultural burning** has the objective to enable Aboriginal community participation in cultural informed burning activities with NPWS. It is any cultural informed burn that would not normally meet the competency, PPE or other provisions of the Fire Management Manual, but can be safely undertaken within the community led (low risk) cultural burn guidelines.

1.3 Scope and application

- This Policy applies to all lands acquired or reserved under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, including lands managed by NPWS under Part 11 of the Act. This policy does not apply to NPWS managed lands under Part 4A of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (Aboriginal Ownership and Leaseback), however Boards of Management may decide to adopt the policy.
- The Fire Management Manual guides all fire management approved by NPWS managers on NPWS lands.
- The Guidelines for Low Risk Cultural Burning on NPWS Managed Lands guides NPWS staff considering undertaking a community (low risk) cultural burn project on NPWS managed lands.

- The Aboriginal Partnerships Policy is the policy for NPWS working and developing partnerships with Aboriginal Communities.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to support Aboriginal community aspirations to connect to and care for Country through cultural fire management on parks.

1.5 Objectives

The objectives of the policy are to:

- engage Aboriginal communities in fire management
- support the practice, promotion and renewal of culture, through use of fire
- integrate cultural fire values, knowledge and practices in NPWS fire management generally, including identifying and protecting natural and cultural values
- facilitate Aboriginal community participation in community (low risk) cultural burns. Requirements for low risk cultural burns are detailed in the Guidelines for Low Risk Cultural Burning on NPWS Managed Lands
- ensure safety for staff and community members and mitigate risk to assets and cultural and nature values, while doing cultural fire management activities
- increase the cultural fire awareness and cultural capabilities of NPWS staff
- recognise and protect Aboriginal knowledge and practice in cultural fire management as the cultural intellectual property of Aboriginal people
- protect and enhance natural and cultural values through culturally informed planning and operations that implement appropriate fire regimes in partnership with Aboriginal communities
- partner with public and private sector organisations to facilitate Aboriginal community participation in cultural fire management.

1.6 Policy

NPWS will allow for opportunities across the full spectrum of cultural fire management from Aboriginal communities informing burns that are performed by NPWS staff and other appropriately qualified community members, through to community participation in low risk burns.

NPWS acknowledges that:

1. Aboriginal community aspirations for connecting to and caring for Country can be supported through integrating cultural fire practices into fire management on parks.
2. Aboriginal culture is living, and maintenance of culture requires continuing access to Country to practice, promote and renew practices.

3. Aboriginal communities are custodians of their culture and Country. Parks are part of Aboriginal people's Country.

Opportunities for Aboriginal people to talk, learn and protect Country will vary according to beliefs, practices, community aspirations and landscapes.

4. Aboriginal communities have diverse cultural identities and values, which will affect their cultural fire practices.
5. Aboriginal cultural fire management provides an Aboriginal perspective in broader fire management.
6. Aboriginal people's aspirations for cultural fire management may extend across their Country and cultural landscapes, which may be beyond NPWS managed lands.
7. Cultural fire management is an opportunity to partner with public and private sector organisations to enable Aboriginal empowerment.

NPWS will:

8. Support Aboriginal people to determine their cultural objectives for fire management.
9. Provide opportunities for the integration of cultural values into fire management.
10. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to practice culture and learn and share knowledge through cultural fire management.
11. Provide opportunities for NPWS burn planners, fire managers and Aboriginal people to share knowledge about activities associated with fire management. This includes planning, training, safety and environmental assessment, preparation, conduct, review and monitoring before, during and after a burn.
12. Integrate cultural fire awareness and cultural capabilities into training and on ground experiences for NPWS staff.
13. Provide more opportunities for cultural fire management to help meet key deliverables for the protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage.
14. Support new and innovative ways to partner, collaborate and engage in the management of fire in reserves.
15. Increase opportunities for Aboriginal communities to be involved in the planning, preparation and approval of burns.
16. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to observe or participate in aspects of burn planning, training, preparation, conduct, monitoring or review, in a safe and rewarding way, for community (low risk) cultural burns.
17. Identify opportunities for partnerships between Aboriginal communities and NPWS to seek external resources and other agency collaboration.

Safety:

18. NPWS will respect Aboriginal community wishes around cultural protocols. NPWS has a duty of care to have adequate procedures and requirements in place to ensure cultural fire management is undertaken safely and to minimise risks to all people including

community members and park neighbours. Any burn operation conducted or endorsed by NPWS on NPWS lands will comply with legislation, especially the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, *Rural Fires Act 1997* and *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

19. NPWS must provide a safe work place for its staff and visitors. Reducing the risk to an acceptable level is the primary focus of the requirements specified in the Guidelines for Low Risk Cultural Burning on NPWS Managed Lands.
20. The requirements of the Guidelines for Low Risk Cultural Burning on NPWS Managed Lands must be met to undertake a Low Risk Cultural Burn.
21. A burn operation that does not meet the requirements specified in the Guidelines for low risk cultural burning on NPWS Managed Lands must meet all the provisions of the Fire Management Manual.