

PRESCRIBED BURNS BETWEEN 1999 AND 2009

692. Hon Nigel Hallett to the Minister for Environment

- (1) For each prescribed burn between 1999 and 2009, please detail, —
  - (a) the location and primary burn purpose; and
  - (b) the estimated size of burn?
- (2) What recommendations did the 1994 Fire Review Panel, (that examined the Department of Conservation and Land Management's prescribed burning policy), make for burning to reach acceptable levels?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER replied:

- (1) (a-b) I seek leave to table a paper. [See paper 830.]

The tabled paper contains the information sought for 1,735 prescribed burns carried out by the Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC) three administrative regions in the south-west of the State between 1999 and 2009. This is the priority area for DEC's prescribed burning program as this is where the risk of wildfire impacting on community assets is greatest. DEC has comprehensive digital datasets for the south-west back to 2002. Extensive fire history datasets are available spanning back many decades, however these data are archived in paper based records which are being progressively digitised. State-wide digital datasets are also being developed in response to DEC's expanded responsibilities in recent years for prescribed burning on unallocated Crown land.

The way that burns are described in departmental records has changed over the time period covered by the question. Prescribed burns from 2004 onwards are described by one of six primary burn purposes: biodiversity management; strategic protection; vegetation management; water catchment management; silviculture; and research. Prior to 2004 burns did not have a primary purpose assigned to them but were described by the departmental program that funded the operation: nature conservation; parks and visitor services; sustainable forest management; hardwood silviculture for the Forest Products Commission; and plantation protection for the Forest Products Commission.

While every prescribed burn has a primary purpose, the majority of burns also achieve at least one other purpose. For example, a burn undertaken for biodiversity management often provides a strategic protection outcome.

- (2) The recommendations of the 1994 Fire Review Panel that relate to the issue of "...burning to reach acceptable levels" are listed below. The Panel did not specify what amount of prescribed burning is deemed to be an "acceptable level".

Recommendations:

- 1.1 That Fire Management become the fourth program within the CALM organisation, and that this program receive an additional \$3 million per annum and steps be taken to implement this over the next three year.
- 1.3 That all fit, young CALM staff be required to participate in prescribed burning operations.
- 2.1 That the Government publicly declare that regular prescribed fire is essential to minimise extensive wildfires and publicly recognise that CALM is the appropriate authority to carry out prescribed burning for fuel reduction and habitat management within South-west forests and heath lands.
- 3.1 That the Government accept that prescribed burning to modify fuel loads is the most cost-effective way to modify fire behaviour and is essential to minimise the potential damage from wildfires.
- 4.5 That CALM seeks triennial or rolling funding arrangements for fire management.
- 5.1 That the necessary funding be provided to the prescribed burning program to increase the diversity of season, intensity, frequencies and sequence of fires on any single area to ensure that no species will become threatened or extinct.
- 5.5 That the area burnt in autumn be increased subject to the needs for specific habitat management.