

Procedures for Cultural Burning on land managed by the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service

1 Purpose

To provide Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) employees with detailed information related to the implementation of the PWS Cultural Burning Policy (P-090). These procedures focus on identification and assessment of areas where “low risk [cultural] burning” could be undertaken on land managed by the PWS, approval processes, statutory requirements, and minimum standards for the management of work health and safety (WHS) and environmental risks.

2 Definitions

Authority – an instrument issued in accordance with the *National Parks and Reserves Management Regulations 2019*, Regulation 28, and the *Crown Lands Act 1976*, to undertake works associated with cultural burning.

Cultural burning – any burning led or undertaken by Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations to achieve cultural outcomes.

Culturally informed burning refers to planned burns where the PWS and Tasmanian Aboriginal people or organisations are both involved in the planning, approval or conducting the burn. This includes PWS burning where Aboriginal organisations have had an active role in planning and undertaking the burn. Culturally informed burning provides opportunities to exchange knowledge and skills, increasing confidence in the community to undertake cultural burning.

Experienced firefighter – a firefighter with a minimum of Certificate 11 Public Safety (Firefighting Operations) and experienced in all aspects of vegetation firefighting.

Firefighter – a person who has obtained a Certificate 11 in Public Safety (Firefighting Operations).

Land – refers to Reserved land as defined in the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*, and Crown land as defined in the *Crown Lands Act 1976*.

Observers – persons observing the fire, not entering the fire ground.

Participants – persons involved in lighting the fire.

Person in Charge – an experienced firefighter who has greater than 80 hours bush fire and planned burn experience.

3 Background

The PWS Cultural Burning Policy aims to support Tasmanian Aboriginal people to reconnect with their land and care for Country through cultural fire practices.

The PWS and other organisations will work with Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations to facilitate cultural burning at suitable sites on land managed by the PWS, and provide opportunities for planned burns undertaken by the PWS to be more culturally informed.

These procedures are primarily aimed at enabling PWS staff to define areas and conditions under which low risk cultural burning can occur. It is acknowledged that, at times, higher intensity burning to achieve cultural outcomes is required; however, if it is not low risk, then PWS staff and the Aboriginal organisation need to work together to plan and undertake the burning – known as a culturally informed burn.

The PWS has statutory management responsibilities with regard to the protection and conservation of natural and cultural values in accordance with the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*. The responsibilities also extend to other statutory requirements, in particular the duty of care imposed on the PWS under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* for workers and visitors. Consequently, these procedures seek to balance the need to manage risks, yet allow Aboriginal people the freedom to conduct cultural burning without the planning and approval requirements associated with higher risk burning.

4 Identifying a planned burn as a low risk (cultural) burn

The PWS defines cultural burning as any burning led or undertaken by Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations to achieve cultural outcomes.

Where the area of land and type of burn meets the requirements of 4.1 to be a low risk burn, Aboriginal organisations may be provided an Authority to undertake a cultural burn. Only burns assessed as low risk can be led and undertaken by an Aboriginal organisation. If the site and environmental conditions (4.1.2(a)) are not conducive to conducting a low risk burn, then usual PWS planned burning processes apply.

Culturally informed burning refers to planned burns undertaken with Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations being involved in the planning, approval, or conducting of the burn. This includes PWS burning where Aboriginal organisations have had an active role in planning and undertaking the burn. However, culturally informed burning may not always have Aboriginal people involved on the fire ground.

Burns not assessed as low risk could be undertaken as a culturally informed burn. This situation would likely occur where high fuel loads would not make a low risk burn possible and, in such cases, the Tasmanian Aboriginal organisation could work with the PWS to undertake a culturally informed burn. With a reduction in fuel loads, in future years a low risk cultural burn may be possible.

If an area is assessed as being able to be burnt using a low risk burn, then Aboriginal organisations may be issued an Authority to undertake the burn subject to these procedures.

4.1 Process for identifying a planned burn as a low risk cultural burn

4.1.1 An Aboriginal organisation can contact the relevant Regional Manager to undertake a cultural burn.

4.1.2 The PWS Regional Manager must inform the State Fire Management Officer of a request from an Aboriginal organisation to undertake a cultural burn.

4.1.3 The PWS will undertake an assessment of the proposed burn area with representatives of the Aboriginal organisation to determine if it meets the site and environmental requirements (4.1.4(a)) for a low risk burn.

4.1.4 For a cultural burn to be considered low risk, the following requirements must be met:

(a) Site and other environmental requirements:

- Slope less than 5 degrees along burn boundaries (topography inside the burn perimeter can exceed 5 degrees).
- Smoke from the area is unlikely to create a nuisance.
- The burn area is simply defined and does not include values or assets that require protection from fire.
- No threatened species exist in the area that could be adversely impacted by fire.
- Vegetation communities targeted for burning are fire dependent and would benefit from a low-intensity burn.
- The burn frequency is within tolerable fire regimes [Tolerable Fire Intervals for TASVEG communities .pdf \(nre.tas.gov.au\)](#).
- Fuel loads are such that burning could be undertaken with an average flame height of one metre and a rate of spread less than 200 metres/hour.
- The area is not within an Asset Protection Zone (APZ1). Burns in asset protection zones are aimed at fuel reduction to protect assets; they require a higher intensity burn.
- Boundaries are highly likely to contain the fire without the need for participants or firefighters to extinguish the fire.

(b) Weather and fire danger requirements:

- The predicted fire behaviour (considering Forest Fire Danger Index and fuel load) is expected to be benign e.g. an average flame height of one metre, and a rate of spread less than 200 metres/hour).
- The relevant fire danger rating for the vegetation type in **Table 1** is expected to remain so for at least two days after the planned burn.
- The burn must not be undertaken during a Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) fire permit period.
- The burn must only be conducted when weather and moisture conditions are within the parameters as specified in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Weather and moisture conditions – low risk burning

Parameter	Buttongrass	Grassland	Dry Forest	Heath
Soil Dryness Index (or equivalent)	<10	<15	<15	<15
Temperature	<20	<20	<20	<20
Relative humidity	>60%	>60%	>60%	>60%
Wind speed (km/h measured in the open at two metres)	<5 km/h	<15 km/h	<15 km/h	<5 km/h
Grassland Curing		<80%		
Fuel Moisture			>18%	>20%
Overall Fuel Hazard Rating	Low	Low	Low	Low
Days since rain (>2mm)	2-10	2-10		2-10
Moorland Fire Danger Rating	≤5			
Grassland Fire Danger Rating		<5		
Forest Fire Danger Rating			<5	≤5

- 4.1.5 A fire in Buttongrass moorland should self-extinguish when the forecast conditions are within the parameters, outlined in **Table 2**.

Table 2 Forecast conditions parameters

Parameter	Buttongrass
Soil Dryness Index (or equivalent)	≤5
Relative humidity	>60%
Temperature	<10°
Wind speed (km/h measured in the open at 2 metres)	≤5 km/h

4.2 Standard requirements and conditions of an Authority to conduct a low risk, cultural burn:

- 4.2.1 Notwithstanding the requirements of this section, the PWS Deputy Secretary may issue an Authority containing modified conditions to an Aboriginal organisation to conduct a burn if, all factors considered, he or she is satisfied that the burning prescriptions present a low risk.
- 4.2.2 The PWS Deputy Secretary or Regional Manager may issue an Authority for up to one year to an Aboriginal Organisation to conduct low risk cultural burning in an area that meets the requirements of 4.1.2.
- 4.2.3 Approval to undertake a low risk cultural burn will only be provided where the Aboriginal organisation agrees to the following conditions (which will be included in the Authority):
- Holds current Public Liability Insurance for the term of the Authority, a copy of which must be provided to the PWS Regional Manager. If the insurance expires during the Authority period, the Aboriginal organisation is required to provide a copy of the renewed Public Liability Insurance that covers the Crown.
 - Conduct the burn in accordance with the prescriptions specified in **Table 1**.
 - To contact the relevant PWS Regional Manager the day before a burn to confirm forecast weather conditions are appropriate (that is, likely to meet the requirements listed in **Table 1**).
 - Not burn during a TFS declared fire permit period.

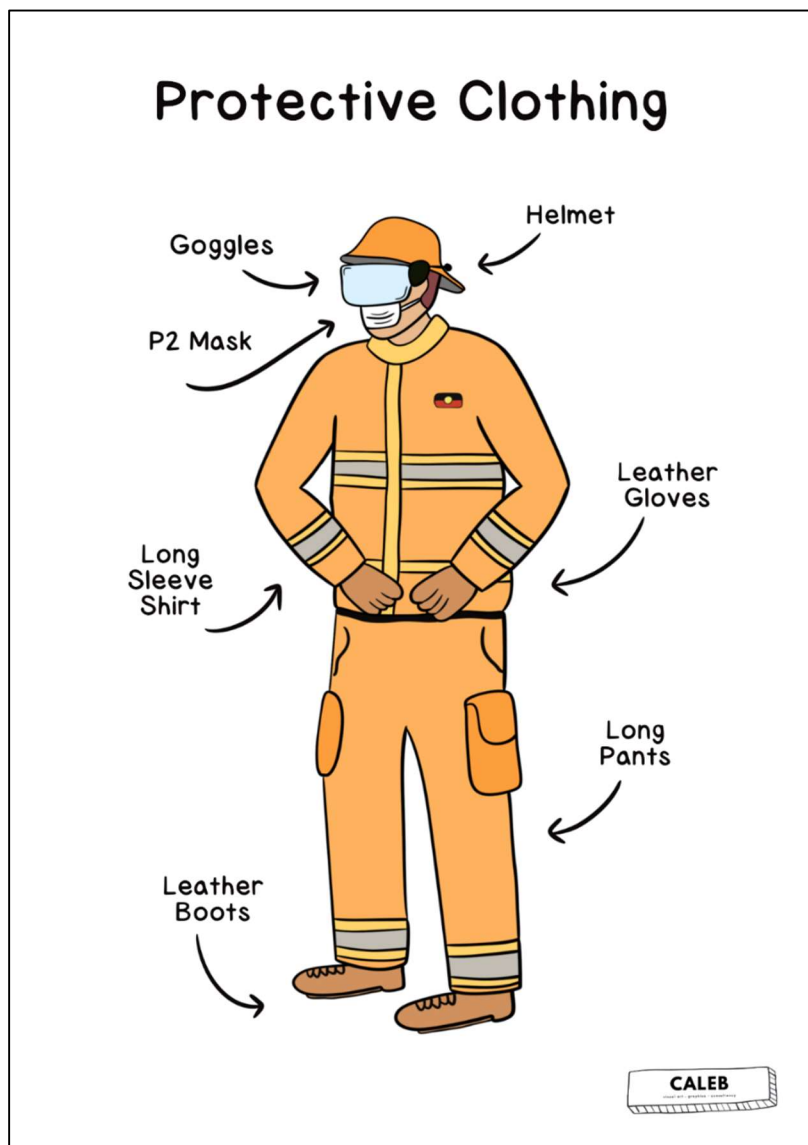
(e) Ensure participants wear the following personal protective equipment (PPE) as shown in the diagram below:

Essential:

- Cotton, wool, and/or specialist firefighting clothing, e.g. fire retardant overalls, no clothing made out of synthetic materials, and no shorts or short sleeves.
- Leather boots.

Recommended:

- Leather gloves.
- Goggles without air breather holes, so that smoke is kept out.
- Dust masks (e.g. masks suitable for welding are best).
- Hard hats (if burning areas with trees, these are essential).



- (f) Undertake the burn in accordance with any special conditions, for example, wind direction is favourable to operations that are specified in the Authority.
- (g) Ensure that all persons involved in the burn receive a pre-ignition briefing. The briefing should cover:
 - Boundaries of the burn area.
 - The lighting pattern to be used.
 - Method of communication that will be used.
 - Ideally, participants should drive or walk the block prior to ignition so they can familiarise themselves with the terrain and escape routes.
- (h) A person appointed to be the Person in Charge on any burn must be an experienced firefighter who has greater than 80 hours bush fire and planned burn experience.
- (i) The Person in Charge must conduct a site briefing involving all participants before commencing the burn.
- (j) Children (people under 18) must be accompanied and be under the supervision of an adult at all times and if participating they must meet all other mandatory requirements of the procedures.
- (k) The Aboriginal organisation needs to determine that the number of experienced firefighters assisting with the burn is sufficient for all participants (and observers) to maintain visual contact with each other at all times.
- (l) Everyone attending the burn must be supervised by an experienced firefighter who will provide assistance and keep them safe.
- (m) Drip torches may only be used by participants who are experienced fire fighters, or participants under the supervision of experienced fire fighters.
- (n) Participants using hoses, pumps or other firefighting equipment must have been trained and deemed competent in the use of the equipment. prior to lighting the fire.
- (o) Observers must not enter the fire ground and must always be in a safe location under the direct sight and supervision of experienced firefighters.
- (p) Tasmanian Aboriginal organisation members not actively involved, and not entering the fire ground, are not required to wear PPE.
- (q) Weather parameters listed in Table 1 are evaluated and recorded prior to light up.
- (r) All PWS employees working on the fire ground must be medically cleared, must have successfully completed the fire fitness test to a minimum standard of moderate, and must wear full PPE in accordance with PWS fire management policies and procedures.

- (s) All participants and observers agree that if the risk increases, or is expected to increase, then those people affected are obliged to move to a safe place under the direction of the Person in Charge until low risk levels return. Reasons for changes in risk levels include, but are not limited to:
- i. Deteriorating conditions,
 - ii. Increased fire behaviour,
 - iii. Obscuring of sight lines between participants, observers and supervising experienced firefighters,
 - iv. Increase in the number of people attending beyond the capacity of the available experienced firefighters to supervise,
 - v. Dangerous or unsafe behaviour by any person/s attending the burn,
 - vi. Failure of firefighting equipment, or
 - vii. any other circumstance that compromises safety.

4.2.4 The relevant PWS regional manager will inform the PWS State Fire Manager when an Aboriginal Organisation is issued an authority to undertake cultural burning.

5 Acknowledgement:

The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service would like to thank Tasmanian Aboriginal people and organisations for their participation in developing these procedures.

6 Policy Owner

PWS State Fire Manager