

TASMANIA PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
CULTURAL BURNING POLICY

Engaging Tasmanian Aboriginal people and organisations to undertake Cultural burning on land managed by the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service



1 Acknowledgement

The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) would like to pay our respects to the *palawa* (Tasmanian Aboriginal) People as the traditional and original owners of *lutruwita*/Tasmania. We remember and honour their Elders past, present and emerging and the Aboriginal community as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of *lutruwita*/Tasmania.

A special thank you to all Aboriginal people and organisations who provided valuable insight and knowledge which has informed the development of this Policy.

2 Definitions

Cultural burning is burning led or undertaken by 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.

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

3 Introduction

This Policy outlines how the PWS will work with and assist Aboriginal people and organisations to undertake cultural burning on the land. The PWS recognises cultural fire management as a fundamental cultural land management practice that benefits the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and the wider community.

The aim of this Policy is to support the Aboriginal community to achieve their outcomes to connect to and care for Country through cultural fire management, and to enable partnerships between the PWS and Aboriginal people and organisations for cultural fire management on land managed by the PWS.

4 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Policy is to outline the guiding principles as to how the PWS will work with the Aboriginal community to achieve outcomes related to cultural burning on the land.

The PWS has statutory management responsibilities for the protection and conservation of natural and cultural values under the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*. The responsibilities also extend to other statutory requirements, in particular the duty of care provision provided for under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* for workers and visitors, which includes contractors and volunteers. Consequently, these requirements have to be taken into account. The PWS cultural burning procedures for planning and approval of cultural burns covers risks associated with conducting a cultural burn, and other factors such as personal protective equipment, signing on and off the fireground, and supervising volunteers and observers.

This Policy applies to all land managed by the PWS, including Reserved land as defined by the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*, and Crown land managed in accordance with the *Crown Lands Act 1976*.

This Policy reflects what Aboriginal people have identified as culturally appropriate ways to be engaged to undertake cultural burning to achieve the objectives of this program.

5 Context

Aboriginal people have been using fire for over 40,000 years in lutruwita/Tasmania. Their use of fire shaped the fauna and flora of this State. Cultural burning is a science based on practice, observation and modification. Cultural burning allows Aboriginal people to feel the spiritual connection that exists between them and the land. Fire is used by Aboriginal people to express and maintain their culture, kinship and identity; to enhance and protect natural and cultural values; and to continue millenniums of sharing knowledge and practice. Aboriginal people were trained in the use of fire from an early age. Fire was also used for Ceremony. It also assisted in gaining access to different areas and to keep trading routes clear.

Cultural burns are designed to be low risk, and are sometimes referred to as 'cool burns'; however, cultural burns can be intense depending on the topography and the objective. In planning a cultural burn, the community needs to spend time walking on Country to assess what needs to be done to achieve a successful burn; and to read and understand Country to ensure the land is ready for burning. The risk of the burn harming natural and cultural values, including people, plants, animals and infrastructure, needs to be assessed, taking into consideration environmental factors such as wind, temperature, soil dryness, relative humidity and fuel load. With this type of burning being predominately low risk, planning and assessment processes have been modified.

6 Aboriginal Community Cultural Burning Outcomes

- The Tasmanian Aboriginal community has a connection to Country, and this will be enhanced by enabling cultural burning on land managed by the PWS, including Crown land.
- The Tasmanian Aboriginal culture is alive and prospering, and fire plays an important role in enhancing that culture and bringing the community closer together.
- The Tasmanian Aboriginal community are custodians of their own culture.
- The Tasmanian Aboriginal community wants to provide opportunities for training and education to promote the benefits of cultural burning practices to community members and external parties.
- Cultural burning is a mechanism to bring community together, and an opportunity to involve government and non-government organisations.
- Increase the opportunity for Aboriginal organisations to be involved in identifying areas to burn, and the planning and preparation to undertake such burns.
- Providing Aboriginal organisations and community members with the opportunity to participate in the preparation, planning and execution of conducting a burn on land managed by the PWS.
- Identifying opportunities for training for Aboriginal community members to be involved and more active on the fireground, this includes fires being undertaken by the PWS.
- That Elders, families and children can be involved in cultural burning activities conducted on land managed by the PWS.
- By conducting cultural burning, this will promote the benefits of caring for Country.

7 Objectives

The objectives of the Policy are to:

1. reinstate a cultural burning program to protect and enhance natural and cultural values on the land and support the practice, promotion and renewal of culture, through the use of fire,
2. enable and empower Tasmanian Aboriginal people and organisations to undertake cultural burning on the land; and
3. through collaborative working relationships, share knowledge of culture and burning practices.

8 Policy

The PWS will:

1. Provide opportunities and support Tasmanian Aboriginal people and organisations to undertake cultural burning on the land; and encourage Aboriginal people to take leadership roles in identifying, planning and conducting cultural burns.
2. In collaboration with the relevant Aboriginal community, identify where cultural burning practice may assist in asset protection and maintaining the natural and cultural values of the land.
3. Facilitate cultural burning by minimising and streamlining documentation and approval processes; and prescribing burning conditions and requirements appropriate to the level of risk.
4. Increase the level of culturally informed burning through the involvement of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and organisations in the planning, preparation, and approval of the PWS planning burning program; and to gain and exchange knowledge and experience.
5. Promote greater PWS employee awareness, and benefits of cultural fire management, through training and on-ground experiences.
6. Work with Aboriginal people and organisations to ensure that safety and risk are managed commensurate with the level of risk.

9 Work Health and Safety

In accordance with the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 2012*, any burning undertaken on the land is defined as work, and the area subject to the burn a 'workplace'. The minimum work health and safety requirements for cultural burning are detailed in the PWS Cultural Burning Procedures.

10 Policy Owner

Director Landscape Programs