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The Bushfire Centre of Excellence for Western Australia

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Achieving best practice in bushfire management

The establishment of a dedicated Bushfire Centre of Excellence for Western Australia is underway. The State Government announced in March 2019 that the facility will be located in the Shire of Murray. To ensure recognition of local culture, heritage and history, the design of the centre will be influenced by the area’s Traditional Owners.

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will work closely with the rural and regional bushfire management sector including state agencies, local governments, non-government organisations, industry, Aboriginal groups, volunteers and the community. It will provide knowledge, technical expertise, science and research, plus high-level training for bush firefighters and other emergency services personnel across the State.

As a shared connection point, the Bushfire Centre of Excellence will draw on the considerable local experience of volunteers and the broader community to share skills and develop new initiatives. This way, all parties can benefit from the transfer of valuable knowledge in bushfire management.

Bushfire Centre of Excellence concept plans include:

- Secure area for training tools and equipment
- Open spaces for public meetings, mobile Incident Control Centre training, outdoor briefings and exercises
- Outdoor training space
- Training rooms
- Independently operated administration and training areas
- Temporary locations for visitors, partners and collaborators
- Office space

A Centre for all

Bushfire management across our vast State is best approached together with all stakeholders. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will reflect this approach in the way it operates.

We have consulted with and gathered valuable input and ideas from more than 200 stakeholders through workshops and forums. This has informed the Bushfire Centre of Excellence proposed service delivery model and key functions.

1. **Bushfire Mitigation Forum**: 300+ attendees including volunteers, volunteer associations, state agencies and local governments. Recorded over 600 views and ideas in first part, and over 750 views and ideas in second part to inform the design of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence.

2. **Service Delivery Model Design Workshop**: 40+ attendees including volunteers, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), local governments and Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA).

3. **Traditional Burning Practice and Discussion Forum**: 30+ attendees including Noongar Traditional Custodians and DFES staff.

As the Bushfire Centre of Excellence takes shape and consultation continues, this service delivery model may evolve.
Training opportunities

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will provide a dedicated facility and team focused on the development and delivery of bushfire management and prescribed burning training. It will support the development of new training courses and improve access to courses already being offered across the sector. The facility will deliver high-level, technical training and include areas for exercising incident management teams and incident control centre personnel. This will enhance existing DFES capability by providing practical, ‘real life’ training.

A key focus will be on strengthening regional and local delivery of fundamental bushfire and prescribed burning courses, by increasing support for current trainers and assessors. This will work to ensure everyone has access to the same resources whether they’re based in Esperance, Wyndham or in the Perth Hills. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will also improve access to training, knowledge and resources through innovative technologies used across the sector such as virtual reality, online learning and digital simulations.

A review of existing bush firefighting training courses is complete and a number of new courses are in the final stages of development. The first revised courses include:

- Introduction to Bush Firefighting
- Introduction to Firefighting
- Bush Firefighting
- Introduction to Structural Firefighting
- Structural Firefighting
- Advanced Bush Firefighting
- Crew leader

The new bush firefighting training products are modular and provide flexibility in delivery to suit local needs. Duplication in the previous training courses has been removed and content, including videos, will be updated. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will continue to review and expand its training products over coming years.

Decentralised delivery

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will work closely with valued partners in the bushfire management sector to deliver training locally and to ensure lessons and ideas are shared and promoted across the State. Relationships, partnerships and well-established networks will support decentralised training delivery with the widest possible reach. This will lead to quality training, sharing of best practice and easier access to a variety of training options. Stakeholder networks will also provide resources and knowledge (traditional, academic and experiential) that will help improve bushfire management.
Knowledge management

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will focus on gathering three kinds of knowledge from a variety of sources:

1. Traditional fire knowledge and practice.
2. Academic understanding of bushfire, its risk and management.
3. Lessons learned through experience working with bushfire and its risk.

With this, the Bushfire Centre of Excellence can manage and work with a wide range of bushfire knowledge in developing best practice for bushfire management.

Engagement and outreach

Through engagement and outreach, the Bushfire Centre of Excellence will continue to strengthen its partnerships and relationships with stakeholders. Clear communication will be established and enhanced so bushfire knowledge is available and accessible across the sector. Partnerships and communication are key to our success and a small, dedicated team will coordinate this important function.

Key principles of the Centre

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence is committed to these guiding principles:

1. Reflect and serve the whole of the bushfire management sector – state agencies, local governments, non-government organisations, industry, Aboriginal groups, volunteers and communities.
2. Recognise excellence in bushfire management where it exists, irrespective of agency, organisation or affiliation.
3. Be decentralised in its delivery of training programs and other services to the extent possible, to promote adaptability, accessibility and local relevance.
4. Design its activities and services to be scalable, appreciating that many of the challenges in bushfire management in Western Australia are shared by other states and international partners.
5. Promote sector interoperability through shared training programs and peer-to-peer learning.
6. Have staffing that is representative of the communities it serves, and meets the expectations of the Government of Western Australia for diversity and inclusion.
7. Acknowledge and incorporate the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal people in fire management in Australia.

Find out more at: dfes.wa.gov.au/rfd / Email: bushfirecoe@dfes.wa.gov.au

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Minister for Emergency Services the Honourable Francis Logan MLA

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence is a transformational project for Western Australia. It is a key part of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ Rural Fire Division, which was established in 2018 to improve the Department’s focus on rural and regional bushfire management. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will enhance volunteer training and become a centre for bushfire knowledge, science and research.

The McGowan Labor Government is proud to invest in this first-of-its-kind facility that will strengthen the capability of our emergency services and improve community safety across our State. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will help us all improve bushfire management outcomes through leadership, collaboration and innovation across the sector, and further harness the value of local skills and expertise. This innovative facility will be a short drive from Pinjarra and major transport links to ensure convenience and accessibility for visitors travelling from around the State and nation.

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm AFSM

Since the announcement of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence in April 2018, a significant amount of work has been done to shape the functionality and design of the facility. Whilst we still have a long way to go, this could not have been achieved without the valuable input from hundreds of stakeholders from across the bushfire management sector. Their local knowledge and experience is highly valued by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and will continue to be harnessed by the Bushfire Centre of Excellence to achieve the best possible outcomes in bushfire management.

Enhanced knowledge within our emergency services and our communities is central to this inaugural project. The facility will offer a range of bushfire training courses and the key focus will be supporting local knowledge and training in the regions. I look forward to seeing the Bushfire Centre of Excellence welcome volunteers and stakeholders from across the State in the coming years as we work towards a safer State, together.