



## Key principles to understanding prescribed burning

### **1 – Fire as management tool of the landscape has been used since ancient times in Australia, and it remains a key tool in the face of climate change.**

Both natural fires and fire used by Aboriginal people have shaped much of Australia's flora and fauna. For millennia, fire was used in the Australian landscape by indigenous Australians. More recently, land management professionals have developed and refined landscape-scale burning as a modern bushfire mitigation tool and indigenous Australians have been reintroducing traditional burning techniques. Whilst climate change is altering some of the parameters for prescribed burning, it remains a key tool in managing bushfires.

### **2 – Nothing will stop intense bushfires, but prescribed burning will significantly mitigate them.**

Not even the biggest water-bombing aircraft can stop the head of a major bushfire burning under extreme conditions, so it is self-evident that prescribed burning cannot stop the forward spread of very intense bushfires whose behaviour is driven by extreme weather parameters rather than fuel levels.

However, it is also a reality that around 95% of the time bushfires burn under moderate, mild, or benign conditions where their behaviour is primarily driven by fuel levels. The intensity of such fires which are the majority of bushfires can be substantially mitigated if they have reduced fuel levels from previous prescribed burning.

### **3 – Reduced fuel levels enable fire-fighters to control more fires quicker and reduce the amount burned.**

The primary value of reducing forest fuel levels is that it enables fire-fighters to more quickly control most fires with less area burnt. Many of the huge fires we are now experiencing were initially burning under mild conditions, it is apparent that reduced fuel levels would have assisted fire-fighters to control them before the on-set of dangerous fire weather conditions which made them uncontrollable.

### **4 – Bushfires will still burn but reduced fuel levels will reduce severity.**

Even when bushfires are burning under extreme conditions, reduced fuel levels provide a substantial benefit in reducing fire severity sufficiently to lessen impacts to wildlife, soil, water and cultural values in comparison to the impacts of the same fire burning through heavy fuels.

Furthermore, while reduced fuel levels will not stop the head of an intense fast-moving bushfire, they can sufficiently mitigate fire behaviour on the fire's flanks to allow control line construction thereby minimising the risk of broad fire flanks becoming head fires under a later wind change.

### **5 – Prescribed burning is not the perfect solution, but over time it is beneficial.**

There is no panacea for our bushfire problem, and prescribed burning should not be promoted as the only solution. Equally however, it should not be castigated and dismissed because it does not stop intense, fast moving bushfires. Such criticism is as misguided as dismissing the value of seat belts in cars because people still die in car accidents. Both seat belts and prescribed burns are highly beneficial most of the time.

### **6. The IFA recognises the fire management skills of the traditional indigenous owners of the land.**

The IFA supports the use of fire in northern Australia, particularly by indigenous Australians for sustainable forest management including carbon emission reduction, forest health, and ecological values. IFA encourages the extension of this approach to other regions of Australia.