

## 6<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conference:

### Regional Statement of the Australasia Region – An Input Paper to the Conference Statement

13 October 2015

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#### **General Fire Assessment**

Australia's most active connections to the international wildland fire world are organised through the Forest Fire Management Group. The Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG) works bi- and multi-laterally with New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Mexico and France toward an improved understanding of wildland fire management. The rich history of knowledge exchange and study tours can be credited with the development of the highly functional operational agreements.

The operational cooperation of Australian fire management agencies with international partners is guided primarily by the Australian National Bushfire Management Policy Statement – authored by the Forest Fire Management Group (FFMG) and last published in 2014 for the audience of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). This simply states that Australia will continue to maintain and improve its status as a leader and cooperative partner. It specifically mentions the bilateral agreements with New Zealand, Canada and the United States, as well as support for the International Wildland Fire Conferences and cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Unfortunately contributions to the Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) are not mentioned.

Australia remains active in bushfire research through the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Program, an eight year program in cooperation with over 10 Australian universities with specific research projects around fire monitoring and prediction, prescribed burning and next generation fire modelling. Through a partnership of FFMG and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC), a national multi-faceted project to document Australian prescribed burning best practices and fuel classifications, is currently being progressed (completion planned for 2017) and will provide a suite of doctrine that is likely to have international application in eucalypt forests.

The New South Wales Rural Fire Service is completing a three year 'Australia Africa Partnership Facility' funded by AusAID assisting the Botswana government to establish a safe and effective fire regime.

FFMG is active in advocating for a better understanding of the threat posed by vegetation fires at the global scale. An example of this can be found in the paper presented to the FAO Asia Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) and the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) which advocates an internationally coherent approach to assessing risk and for countries to integrate fire risk concepts and risk reduction activities (including prescribed fire) into rural land and forest management legislation. The intended result of this would be to manage fire from the perspective of responsible land management rather than simply from the perspective of an unforeseeable natural disaster.

Most recently the FFMG in 2014, organised the inaugural International Bushfire Symposium on the back of a study tour organised for the North American Fire Management Working Group (FMWG), including Canadian, US American and Mexican fire managers. The inclusion of representatives from the French risk management agency *Pole Risques* broadens the circle in which Australian fire managers are working, and again there is substantial overlap with the goals and activities of the WFAG.

#### **Conclusions**

The FFMG advocates continued international collaboration and cooperation with its counterparts in North America and increasingly with other European agencies. We commend and support the development of an International Fire Strategy, which will facilitate greater collaboration in training, science and technology exchanges, and information and resource-sharing.

### ***Recommendations***

We strongly support the NAFC-FMWG recommendation that FFMG of Australia and New Zealand continue its close cooperation and communication through study tours and reciprocal participation at annual meetings. We also support FMWG hosting the 2nd International Symposium during the 2016 Australia/New Zealand study tour of North America and strongly recommend attendance by other countries and agencies.