



## Regional Session I: Australasia and North America

11 May 2011, 15:50 – 18:10

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### Conclusions and Recommendations

The Australasian and North American Regional Session considered the regional activities and emerging issues that have occurred in the period between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conferences; the land management and societal issues associated with the use of fire and with the prevention of wildfire; and the strengthening collaborative efforts between and within the regions. This session was based on the work of a working group, representative of the regions, that met on Monday and drafted papers to hasten discussion during the Regional Session of the Conference.

Global issues impacting on the two regions were identified and discussed. They included:

**(i) Socioeconomic issues**

- Primacy of life protection
- Fire suppression challenges; changing fuels, fire weather, ignition patterns
- Escalating suppression costs
- Community based fire management – communications, interactions, education, awareness, expectations, and inclusive decision making
- Resourcing including demographics, shifting population, succession planning
- Fuels – buildup, forest health, vegetation changes
- Land management value not recognized
- Fire management needs – resourcing, Regional and inter-regional sharing
- Public health (air quality) and safety

**(ii) Environmental issues**

- Global change – climate, population dynamics, and land use changes
- Political positioning- social and ecological disruption
- Fuels – forest health, vegetation changes
- Healthy fire regimes
- Invasive species
- Maintaining ecosystems services – carbon, water, biodiversity

**(iii) Political positioning**

- Political positioning of social, economic, and environmental issues

**(iv) Knowledge**

- Insufficient fire research.
- Existing research findings not being fully applied.
- Requirement of better data collection and knowledge systems.

### Conclusions / Recommendations

The evolving strong cooperative approach between these two geographic regions in fire management and fire research was clearly evident throughout this session. The similarities continue as each experience increased fire activity; increasing threat to human life, health and property; increased public and legal scrutiny; conflicting public policies adversely impacting on strategies to address the fire threat, and a greater demand on limited management and suppression resources.

Sharing of information and knowledge, research collaboration, resource sharing and multi-agency integration (through ICS) are key strategies being employed to address the emerging fire threat.

Fortunately, Australasian and North American regions are in a good position to be able to continue to strengthen their capacities in this regard due to hemispheric differences in fire season timing.

These positive factors have paved the way for enhanced cooperation through the signing of several Memorandums of Understanding. During this joint Regional Session several documents and certificates were signed that again demonstrate the strong cooperation existing between these regions of the globe:

- North American Forest Commission's Fire Management Working Group and the Australian / New Zealand Forest Fire Management Group
- Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council
- United States Forest Service and the Australasian Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre
- United States Department of the Interior and the Australasian Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre
- Centre for Fire Research and Outreach and the Australasian Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre
- Canadian Forest Service and the Australasian Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre

The Australasia and North America Regional Session wished to express strong concern at the escalation of wildfires across the globe and the severe impact this is having on communities, the environment and the world economy.

The Australasia and North America Regional Session participants acknowledged the benefits derived through collaboration in sharing information and researching new ways to tackle emerging issues.

There was a strong belief that real urgency is required that includes holistic planning with full inclusive action. To that end the Australasia and North America Regional Session propose to the 5<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conference:

1. That a series of Regional Consultations, bringing together the operational fire experts and fire scientists be held globally, within the next 1-2 years, to further examine the fire issues resulting from population change and global warming.
2. That the Australasia and North America Regions hold a Regional Consultation in 2012 / 2013.
3. That the 2nd International Wildland Fire "Summit" of operational fire experts and scientist, be held within the next 2 to 4 years under the auspices of the United Nations, with a view to developing recommendations for the United Nations, to address the global issues raised during this Conference's Regional Session.
4. Notes the increasing acceptance of the FAO 2006 Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines and that all delegates continue to encourage their adoption.
5. Encourages the full global adoption of the Incident Command System (ICS) for the management of incidents.
6. Support enhanced collaboration of research, information, training and the sharing of experiences through global knowledge and information management.
7. Further, the Australasia and North America Regional Session recommends, through the six FAO Regional Forestry Commissions, to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - Committee on Forestry, the following:
  - 7.1 Promote and gain recognition of the following subordinate elements: Achieving an optimum balance of effort and resource expenditure on the following types of risk treatment:
    - Improving knowledge regarding effects and behaviour of wildfire, vulnerability of particular land objectives and vegetation types and modification of fire-related risk
    - Constraints in relation to the use of land and the use of fire as a risk treatment
    - Obligations and accountabilities in relation to ownership of land
    - Fuel load modification
    - Watershed management
    - Public education including the promotion of protection of land objectives
    - Wildfire control and suppression
    - Post-fire (burned area) land remediation and recovery
    - Building controls (in relation to vulnerability of buildings to wildfire)

- Monitoring of relevant parameters affecting wildfire hazard and providing real time hazard assessment
  - Response planning
  - Data collection
  - Impacts on community recovery
- 7.2 The need for different types of fire response agencies but provide for efficient deployment and coordination of effort of all agencies to deal with wildfire
- 7.3 Encouraging innovation in respect of all aspects of the assessment and treatment of wildfire risk
- 7.4 Creation and sharing of national and international research into wildfire-related risk is encouraged
- 7.5 Identification and specification of the skills sets required of those with specific responsibilities for the management of wildfire-related risk and incorporation of curriculum elements relating to management of wildfire-related risk in all academic areas of study which impact upon the achievement or pursuit of land objectives
- 7.6 Sustainable funding models

The Regional Session acknowledged that fire management is a fundamental element for consideration in all policy, legislation and practices related to land management planning and objectives. As a result the following were recommended:

8. Policy, legislation and practice in relation to fire should be based on the specific land objectives of the land concerned and should be determined through the application of contemporary risk management principles and practice. "Land management objectives" include but are not limited to:
- Ecosystem conservation
  - Maintaining biodiversity
  - Protection of habitat
  - Water supply
  - Food supply
  - Other economic uses
  - Recreation
  - Human habitation
  - Location of other societal infrastructure
9. Legislation that impacts on any aspects of management of fire-related risk should provide a cohesive and integrated approach in which:
- The legislated purposes of all relevant legislation should explicitly refer to the advancement and protection of land objectives.
  - The meaning of *risk* is 'effect of uncertainty on objectives' (in this case, the land objectives) with risk being expressed in terms of a combination of the consequences of an event on those objectives, and the likelihood of those consequences being experienced.
  - In making decisions about risk management, decision-makers are advised to apply methods and approaches that as far as possible are common across the organization, jurisdictions and countries and reflect recognized contemporary best practice.
  - Those who own, control and manage land are an integral part of the statutory arrangements.
  - Communication and consultation with communities of interest is advised.
  - The use of fire as a land management technique is explicitly recognized.
  - Creation and sharing of national and international research into wildfire-related risk is encouraged.
  - The skill sets and competencies required of those with specific responsibilities for management of wildfire-related risk are identified and specified.

The Australasia and North America Regions noted that there is an increasing urgency to more fully integrate natural resource managers, and better connect decisions made at the land management / land use planning stage and their political wildfire outcomes. Consequently, this session recommends:

10. Future wildland fire conferences consider expanding their audience beyond the fire management community