

Roadside vegetation management

Fire exemption for roadsides

Background

A new exemption has been introduced to the Victoria Planning Provisions that simplifies the process for road managers to manage native vegetation on roadsides for bushfire risk mitigation.

The new exemption has been developed in response to recommendations made by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC). In its final report, the VBRC recommended that:

“The State amend the exemptions in clause 52.17-6 to ensure that the provisions allow for a broad range of roadside works capable of reducing fire risk and provide specifically for a new exemption where the purpose of the works is to reduce bushfire risk” (recommendation 60).

Local Government Native Vegetation Reference Group

The exemption was developed collaboratively through the *Local Government Native Vegetation Reference Group*. The group included representatives from local government, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), VicRoads, the former Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and the former Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). In developing the exemption the group was guided by the following principles:

- any exemption should be simple and clear and enable road managers to undertake vegetation treatments on roadsides to reduce bushfire risk
- state-wide consistency, in the risk assessment methodology used to assess bushfire risk by all road managers is preferable
- the link between the risk assessment, determination of appropriate treatments and subsequent works should be transparent. This should be noted in a relevant plan which is part of an existing integrated approach to emergency management

- significant environmental impacts should remain part of the planning permit process to ensure that standard impact assessment is applied.

The exemption

The exemption is:

Guidance for road managers

No permit is required to remove, destroy or lop vegetation to the minimum extent necessary if any of the following apply:

- The vegetation is to be removed, destroyed or lopped to reduce fuel loads on roadsides to minimise risk to life and property from bushfire of an existing public road managed by the relevant responsible road authority (as defined by the Road Management Act 2004) in accordance with the written agreement of the Secretary to the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (as constituted under Part 2 of the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987).

There are two key documents to support the use of the exemption by road managers. DSE developed a guide to assist councils and VicRoads to understand how to implement this new exemption. In addition, Terramatrix Pty Ltd has developed the Road Bushfire Risk Assessment Guideline to assist road managers to undertake the risk assessment process.

There are also tools and templates that have been developed specifically to assist road managers throughout the process.

Risk-based approach

The exemption incorporates a risk based approach that will ensure that native vegetation is removed in areas that pose the greatest bushfire risk to the community.

Fire exemption for roadsides

Under the exemption, road managers will be required to:

- undertake a roadside bushfire risk assessment using an agreed process, focusing on priority roads¹
- identify appropriate vegetation treatments for priority roads and record the results of this in a plan.

The risk assessment process

The roadside risk assessment process is based on the *CFA Roadside Fire Management Guidelines*. The guidelines have four relevant objectives including;

1. Prevent or reduce the risk of fires on roadsides
2. Reduce the risk of spread of fire from the road reserve
3. Manage safety of road users
4. Provide control lines.

The risk assessment process provides a systematic approach to decision making that incorporates defined standards and will achieve state-wide consistency for all road managers. As outlined above, a guideline and tool have been developed to assist road managers.

Treatment selection process

Once the risk assessment process has been completed, road managers can then decide on what treatments will be implemented to reduce the risk of bushfire.

There are a range of factors that can influence the treatment selection at a particular site including cost/benefit of each treatment, amenity, the expected fire behaviour beyond the road reserve or environmental values present. The *Road Bushfire Risk Assessment Guideline* will describe in detail the process for selecting a treatment and includes a Road Bushfire Treatment Selection tool.

¹ As identified through the Victorian Fire Risk Register roads module and/or through the Municipal Fire Prevention Planning Committee.

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Further information

For further information on the exemption and guidance material please visit the DEPI website.

For more information contact:

- Your local council
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) Customer Service Centre on 136 186
- visit www.depi.vic.gov.au
- Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667.

Accessibility

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