



State Bushfire Coordination Committee



Government
of South Australia

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The Wangary incident on Lower Eyre Peninsula in 2005 was the most significant bushfire event in South Australia since Ash Wednesday in 1983. It resulted in nine fatalities, destroyed 93 homes and damaged many more. The fire resulted in economic losses of more than \$40 million, and over 46,000 livestock were killed. It burnt 78,000 hectares from the eastern to the western side of the Peninsula over two days, in extreme fire danger conditions, peaking with a Grassland Fire Danger Index of 345 around noon on 11 January 2005. The fire in these conditions was uncontrollable, but it had followed a day (10 January 2005) where the fire had been contained – but not extinguished – to around 1,400 hectares. The conditions on 11 January 2005 generated outcomes that had not been contemplated.

The then Minister for Emergency Services commissioned a series of reviews, commencing with an independent review by Dr Bob Smith, which considered all aspects of management of the fire, including prevention and preparedness. Dr Smith recommended that a separate review be commissioned to specifically review the approach to prevention and mitigation in South Australia. This occurred, with the then Minister commissioning a [review](#) of bushfire management approaches across Australia, which ultimately recommended the adaptation of the bushfire risk management framework used by the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. In 2009, amendments were made to the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005* (SA) containing major reforms to the bushfire management in South Australia.

These reforms removed the hazard-based approach to bushfire prevention, administered through the State Bushfire Prevention Advisory Committee and District Bushfire Prevention Committees supported by local government across the State. A risk-based approach to bushfire management was introduced, with the State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBCC) established to oversee and coordinate this framework.

The SBCC was tasked with establishing Bushfire Management Areas, and appointing a Bushfire Management Committee for each Area. The SBCC was required to develop a State Bushfire Management Plan, including guidelines to support the development and implementation of Bushfire Management Area Plans (BMAPs). Recognising that fire does not respect property boundaries, BMAPs were intended to be plans across all land tenures, and focus on mitigating risk to assets at greatest risk from bushfire.

While these reviews were occurring, and legislation changing, Kangaroo Island experienced major bushfires, commencing with ignitions resulting from a significant lightning band crossing the Island on 4 December 2007. These fires burnt for three weeks, resulting in one fatality, burning nearly all of Flinders Chase National Park, and large tracts of private land, and totalling nearly 91,000 hectares.

Following these fires, the then Chief Officer of the SACFS, the then Chief Executive of the Department for Environment and Heritage, and the then Mayor of Kangaroo Island Council, jointly commissioned the development of a new bushfire management plan for the Island, based on the New South Wales Rural Fire Service risk management approach. This plan was the State pilot for the bushfire management area plans mandated by the 2009 amendments to the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005* (SA).