Hearing date: 21/04/2026

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Scott Turner

Received date: 09/06/2026

1. **P.29 Melina Bath**
   Question: My question is more on notice. I really want to understand the footprint of that prescribed burn: how much of it was actually the footprint that was supposed to be, and then how much was done. If there is anything that you can tell us, Scott, about that and about the fire that came up from – I do not know if it was south or north, because I am out of my bearings, but if you could provide the whole context around that so that our committee can learn about the importance of these preparatory burns-

   Response:

   Three defined areas of the Carlisle River and Kennedy Creek fires have been reviewed to analyse the effect of fuel modification on bushfires spread and intensity, through burning or non-burn fuel treatments.

   Planned and targeted fuel management has significantly reduced fire intensity and rate of spread, even under extreme conditions, limiting fire movement, enabling effective containment, and reducing impacts on communities, assets, and adjacent landscapes while supporting firefighter decision-making.

   Evidence (per Attachment 1) shows that fuel treatments more than halved the potential rate of spread, preventing further escalation and providing critical time for suppression. The attached 'Otway Bushfire and Burns history map – last 10 years' shows the planned burns delivered within the vicinity of the fire footprint by year. With regards to the planned burn that the inquiry committee observed on the site visit, this was the Tomahawk Creek East West Road (2015) burn, covering an area of 646 hectares, and is shown on page 6 as Site 1B and on the map as Site 1. In response to the fire impacts, the Joint Fuel Management Plan (JFMP) is also being reconfigured in this area to prioritise ecological recovery, reduce unnecessary treatments, and stage future fuel reduction to maintain lower-risk landscapes over time. This includes a shift toward small, low-intensity winter patch burns designed to enhance biodiversity, support species re-colonisation such as Ground Parrots, maintain refuge areas, and build long-term landscape resilience while continuing to mitigate future fire risk.

2. **P.29 Melina Bath**
Question: -Also in relation to fuel hazard levels in this region, the government at the moment has put out a snapshot of a regional level but not a district level. I think it would be really helpful for us to understand at a district level for this region – I am happy for across Victoria – that bushfire risk profile-

Response:
Information on fuel-driven bushfire risk levels for 2024-25 for Regions and Districts can be found at: Bushfire Risk Mitigation Update 2024–25 (FFMVic).

3. **P.29 Melina Bath**
Question: The other thing is I was really impressed with the CEC just before and the resilient forests program. It would be great to understand further – they said that you collaborate with them – the role in breaking down silos. If this is a case study that has happened, that would be fabulous, Scott. Thank you-

Response:

Resilient Forests – Overview and Progress

The Victorian Government's partnership with the Conservation Ecology Centre (CEC) is a mature collaboration grounded in shared objectives and demonstrated outcomes in the Otway Ranges. Since the late 2010s, DEECA and Parks Victoria have worked with CEC on research and threatened species programs, including the *Wild Otways* project (2020–23), delivered with the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. This established a strong foundation of trust, accountability and constructive challenge, enabling the next phase of collaboration through *Resilient Forests*.

Resilient Forests is a partnership between DEECA, CEC and Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC). It supports government commitments to sustainable forest management, climate adaptation and Traditional Owner self-determination. Focused on the foothill forests of the Otways, the initiative applies a place-based approach to develop Adaptation Pathways—integrating Western science, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, operational expertise and community values. This is strengthening social licence, trust and sector capability to trial and embed new approaches to forest management.

Resilient Forests is building capacity and capability for place-based, collaborative and climate-smart forest management. Initiated as a pilot in 2023–24, the project is now in its third year and continuing to mature.

Progress to date

The project has established core frameworks and partnerships, including:

- A conceptual *Adaptation Pathways* model to support flexible, iterative and evidence-based strategic forest planning, maintaining forests within a sustainable range of environmental, cultural, social and risk reduction outcomes
- A Research and Monitoring Framework identifying priority knowledge gaps and data needs
- The *Resilient Forests Knowledge Review*, including a biodiversity vulnerability assessment to guide future action
- The Otway Resilient Forests Network, bringing together stakeholders through structured workshops to co-design a shared vision and inform pathways
- On-ground research trials investigating alternative management approaches, including low-intensity, high-frequency fire. Work is also underway to establish similar research focused on ecological and fuel management responses to active management.

These activities respond to a key challenge: Victorian forests must continue to deliver environmental, cultural, social and risk reduction outcomes while facing intensifying pressures from climate change, severe fire, drought, storms, pests and legacy land-use impacts. This context requires more adaptive, evidence-based and collaborative approaches to forest management, informed by both Western science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Project development

The pilot phase established two foundations:

- A Knowledge Review outlining ecological context, climate risks, management options and research gaps
- A stakeholder engagement process supporting ongoing collaboration and social learning

Building on this, Phase 2 (current) is structured across five workstreams: Adaptation Pathways, Biocultural Landscapes, Research & Monitoring, Stakeholder Engagement, and Leadership & Advocacy. Delivery has been strong, with frameworks established, partnerships deepened and research underway, where some components will continue to mature over time.

Phase 3 focus

Current work is focused on:

- Refining a strategic framework for embedding place-based, biocultural and climate-smart forest planning
- Developing a case study at the Centre Road Healthy Country trial site, including:
  - A biocultural vision led by EMAC
  - Aligned strategic objectives and a site-level management plan

    - A monitoring approach integrating Western science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Demonstrating a scalable model to guide forest management under changing climate conditions.

Key insights

The project has generated broader lessons for forest management:

- Adaptation Pathways enable planning under uncertainty
- Strong partnerships and legitimacy are critical to action
- Integrating knowledge systems produces better outcomes
- Frameworks must be embedded in adaptive management cycles to be effective
- Place-based, biocultural governance requires sustained effort across all levels
- Long-term investment in relationships, research and learning is essential

Next steps

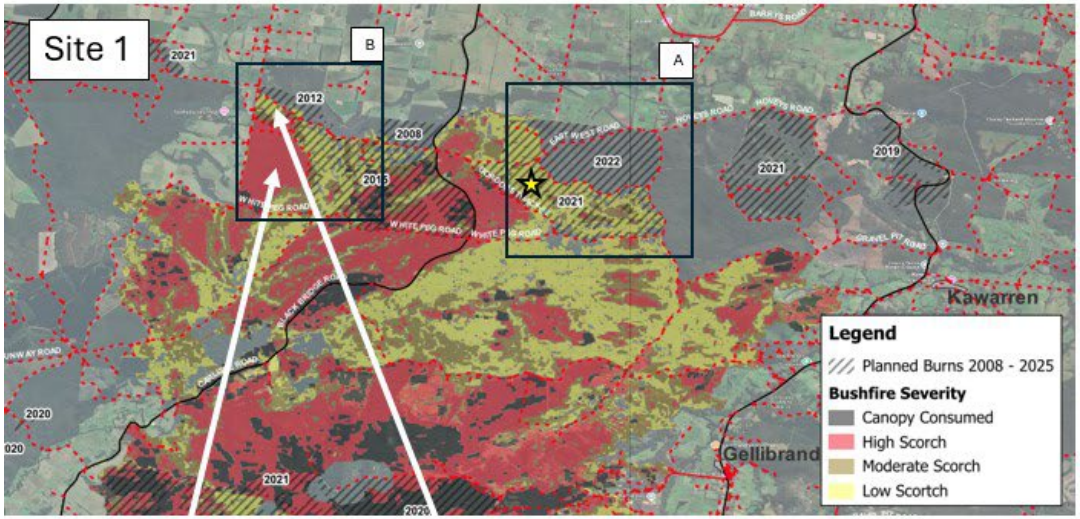
Priority areas for further development are:

- Operationalising Adaptation Pathways within strategic planning
- Embedding biocultural approaches as a core planning pillar
- Expanding research and monitoring to support implementation
- Strengthening stakeholder engagement and EMAC leadership
- Positioning Resilient Forests as a transferable model for statewide application

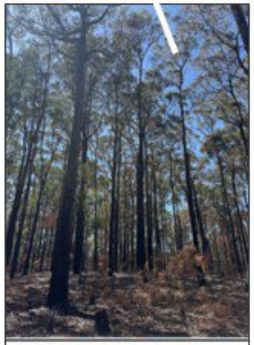
ATTACHMENT 1

Please see separate PDF on the Otway Bushfire and Burns history map for the last 10 years.

The fire-severity map in below highlights the tree severity contrast
•Darker colours = more severe impacts in untreated forest
•Cross-hatched area = the planned burn of 2021, where fire severity clearly decreased once the fire entered the treated zone



High canopy scorch to the south of the burn



Understorey burn with minimal canopy scorch in previously treated area

Reduce intensity combined with weather severity dropping, allowing for the stop of the North East run of fire and consequent impact on private property.

With a patchwork of planned burns over a period of time, bushfire severity, and footprint, was reduced at this location and lead to containment along the northern boundary of the bushfire.

Bushfire severity of Carlise River – Pipeline Road bushfire.

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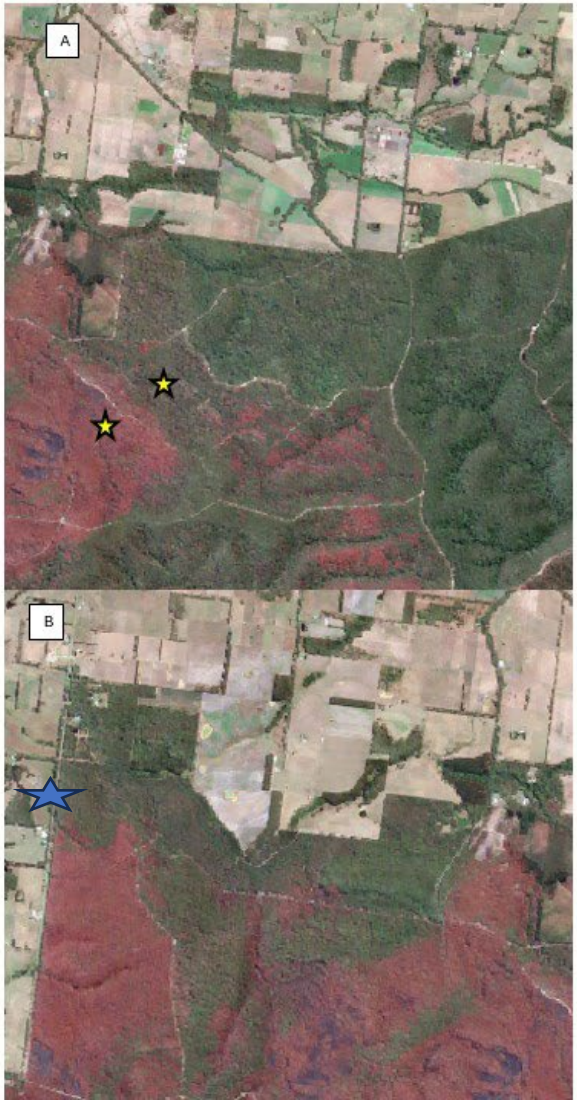
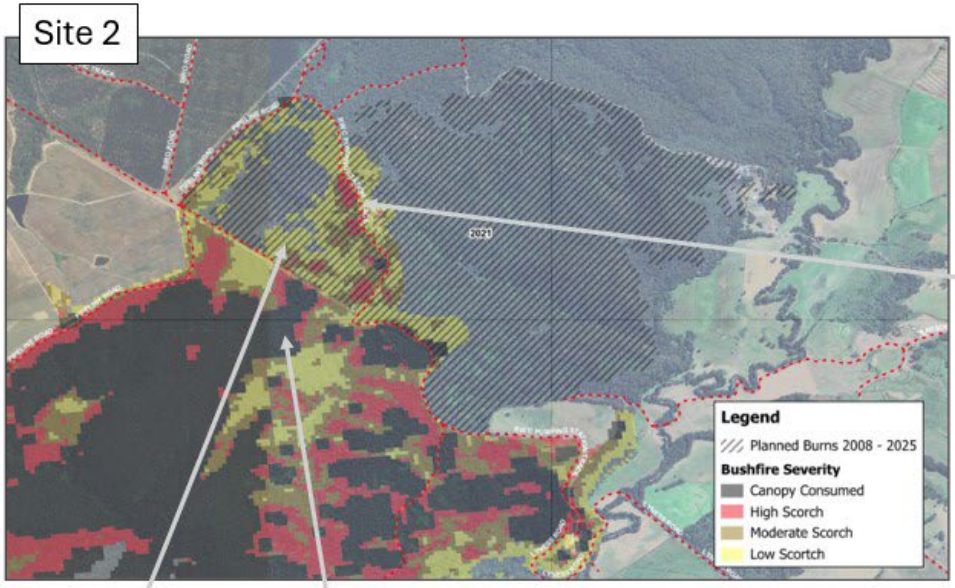
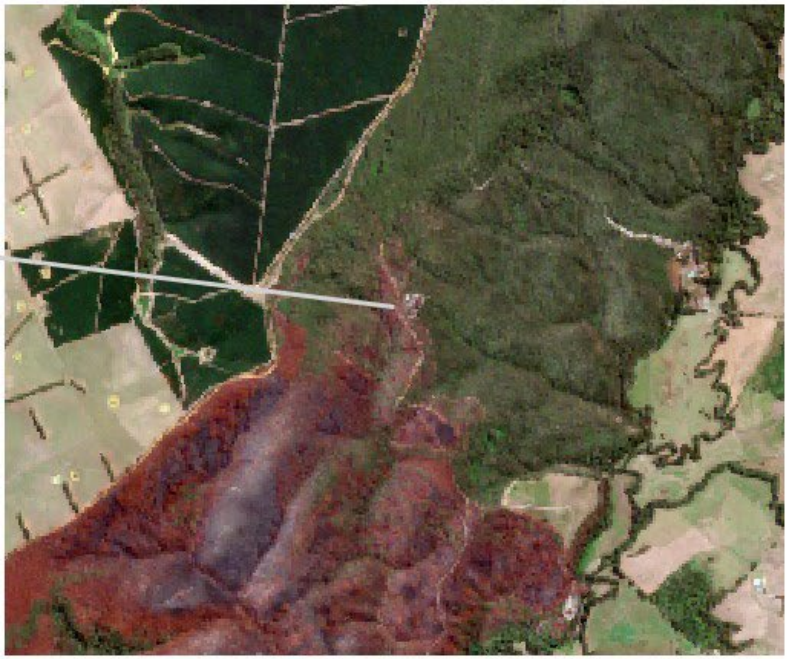




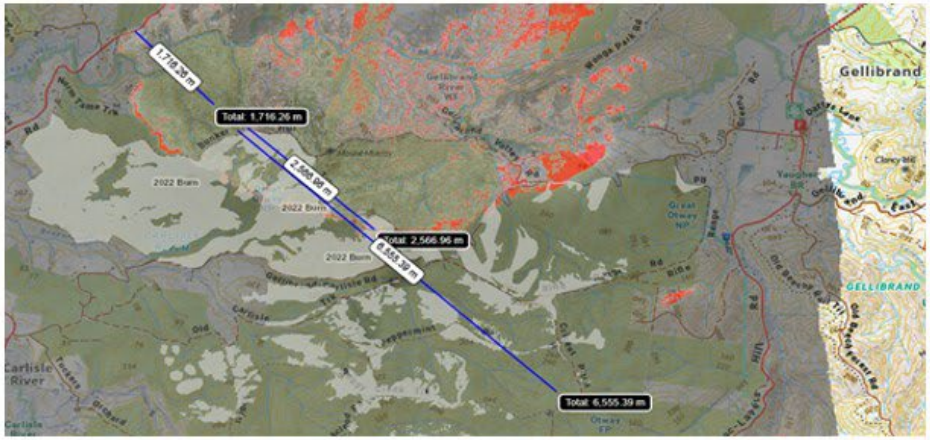


Understorey burn with minimal canopy scorch in previously treated area

Canopy burn and high scorch to the south of the burn

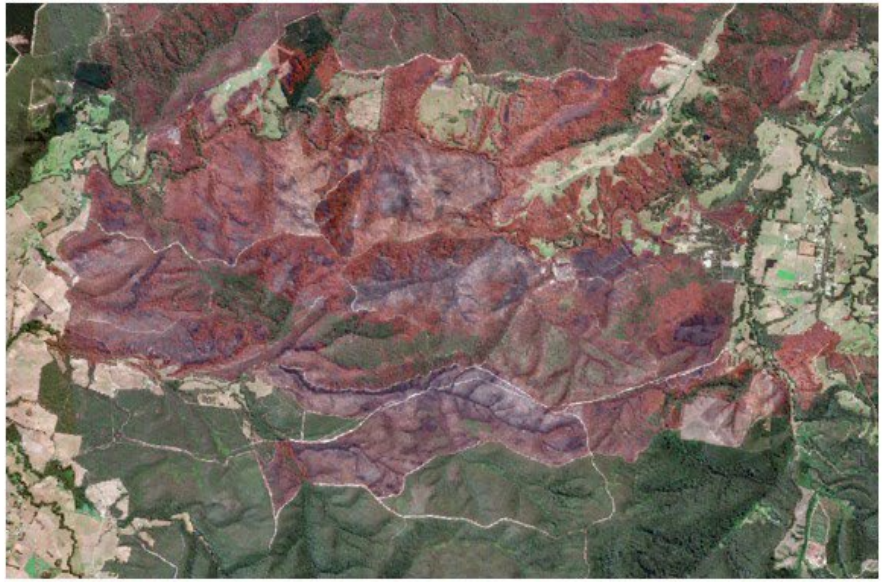
A similar effect is seen with the 2021 planned burn, where intensity decreased, leading to less crown scorch and the subsequent containment of this fire.
Without this burn there is little doubt this would have run North East and connected to the Pipeline fire.

This reduced containment works and likely impact to the adjacent pine plantation. It also provided fauna refuge which will aid in the re-colonisation of the bushfire area.



Specialised imagery also showed the fire travelled about 2.5 km between 1540 and 1917hrs—much less than modelled without fuel treatments (Modelled head-fire rate of spread without fuel treatment was estimated at approximately 1,400–1,600 m/hr, reducing to approximately 600–800 m/hr in treated areas.)

Given the extreme weather (38°C, 11% humidity, strengthening NW winds), modelling in Figure 4 shows the fire could have travelled around 6.5 km over the same period—more than double the observed distance.



Site 3

What could have happened without fuel treatments

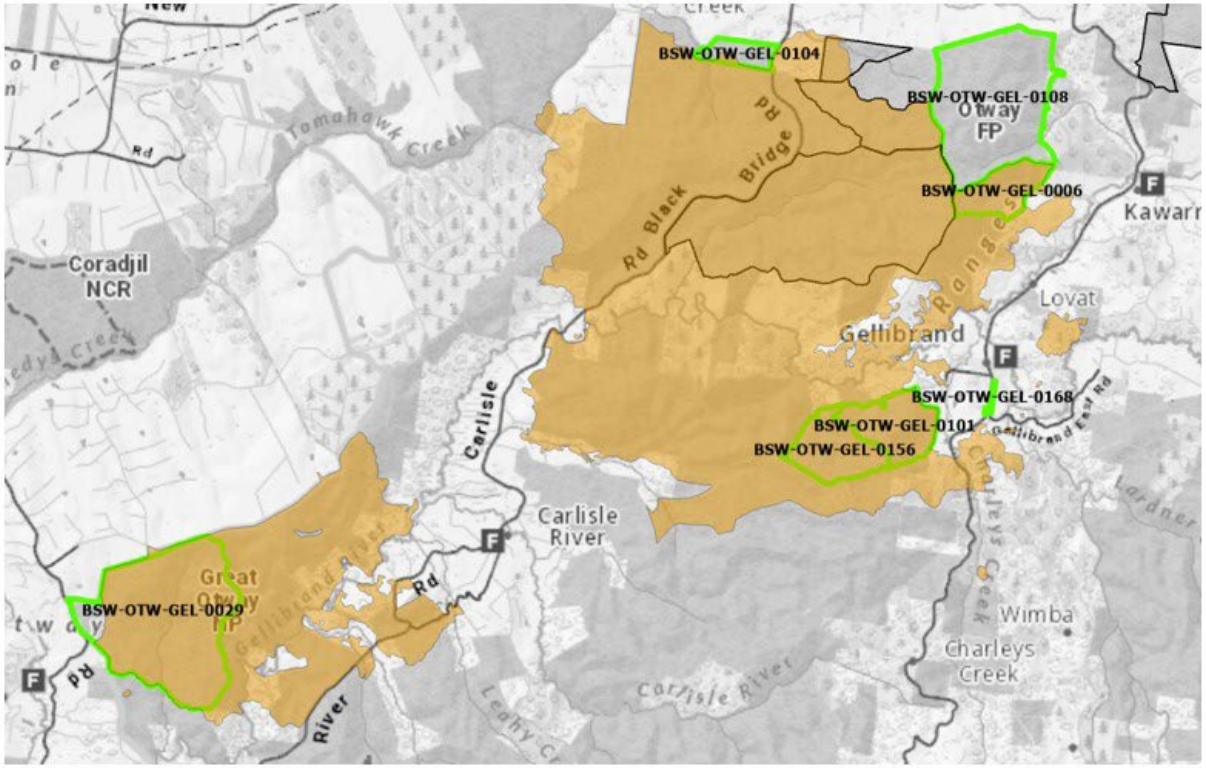
Given the extreme weather (38°C, 11% humidity, strengthening NW winds), modelling in shows the fire could have travelled around 6.5 km over the same period—more than double the observed distance.

This would have significantly increased the fire's size and impact on communities and the landscape. Instead, past planned burns reduced fire intensity, slowed spread, and gave firefighters crucial time to protect people and property.

Altering the Burn Program (Finalisation still pending)

Removal of burns from the JFMP near or within the bushfire.

Burn 29, 156, 168, 006,108, 104



Reconfiguring the JFMP

Burns immediately within or adjacent to the bushfire have been removed from the JFMP.
This is for 3 main reasons.

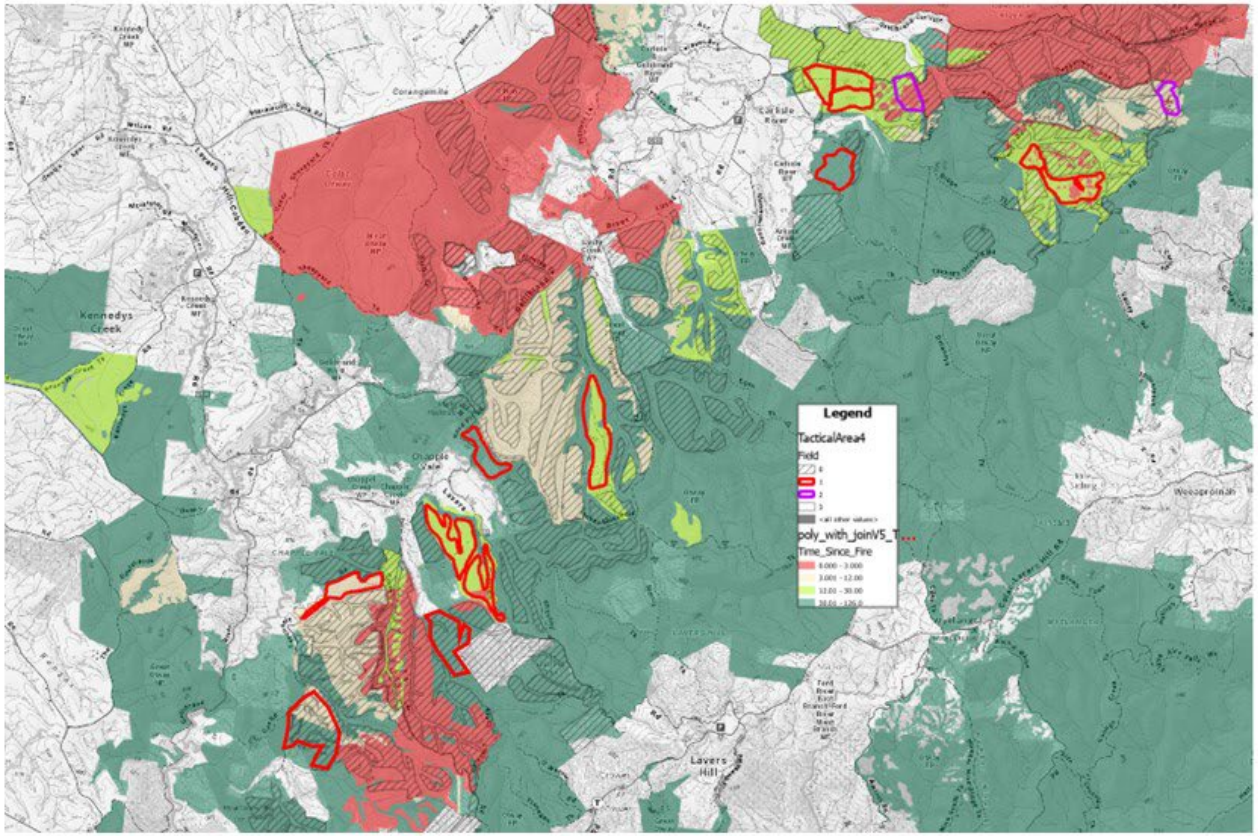
1) Allowing fauna recruitment back into the burn area to be maximized

2) Allowing for some areas to be treated later so there area lower fuel areas within the landscape in 5 – 10 year mark

3) The burns would provide little extra risk reduction

Altering the Burn Program (Finalisation still pending)

Winter burning



Reconfiguring the JFMP

Small patch winter patch burning is being considered

This burning usually involves small but multiple areas of low open heath being burn unbounded.

Target blocks

Conditions for the burning would be:

- Not burning patches next to the bushfire
- Keeping patches small (in the order of < 5ha) limit total size to < 50ha in each LMU (Carlisle / Devondale)
- Limit burning against roads (Help limit predation)
- Target old vegetation growth stages

Objectives:

- Continue to reset country to achieve broad growth stage diversity
- Continue to alter structure to support Ground Parrot re-colonization
- Provide refuge patches should seasonal condition see another increased fire risk season