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## 1. Statement

Council's Natural Area Estate will be managed to protect life and property from wildfire while simultaneously planning, manipulating, and utilising fire to maintain or enhance environmental values.

## 2. Purpose and Principles

This policy provides a framework for the desired aims and outcomes of fire management in response to the regulatory requirements, community and biodiversity needs of Council's Natural Area Estate. It will be delivered through the preparation of procedures, plans, standards and guidelines for fire planning, operations, monitoring and evaluation.

The following principles underpin Council's commitment to fire management within the Natural Area Estate:

- Protect life, property and the environment
- Minimise the risk of fire entering or leaving the Natural Area Estate and impacting upon the Natural Area Estate or adjoining private property
- Maintain ecologically appropriate fire frequencies, distribution, seasonality and intensity
- Ensure the long-term viability and survival of populations of native plants and wildlife
- Ensure cultural heritage and historic values within and around the Natural Area Estate are protected; and
- Minimise social impacts and hazards associated with smoke

## 3. Strategic Plan Links

- Caring for the Community
- Caring for the Environment

## 4. Regulatory Authority

- *Qld Fire and Emergency Services Act (1990)*
- *Sustainable Planning Act (2009)*
- *Nature Conservation Act (1992)*
- *Environment Protection Act (1995)*
- *Local Government Act (2009)*
- *ICC Local Laws*

## 5. Human Rights Commitment

Ipswich City Council (Council) has considered the human rights protected under the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)* (the Act) when adopting and/or amending this policy. When applying this policy, Council will act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and give proper consideration to a human right relevant to the decision in accordance with the Act.

## 6. Scope

### Regional Co-ordination

Council acknowledges that appropriate fire management cannot be achieved in isolation. Council will engage and work with key stakeholders including the Queensland Fire & Emergency Services, Rural Fire Service, adjoining councils, neighbouring property owners, research and special interest groups in planning and conducting its Natural Area Estate Fire Management Program.

### Fire Risk Management

The key issue of fire risk management in the Natural Area Estate will be addressed through a range of strategies and actions, including:

- Maintaining a fire danger schedule for operational response and visitor safety based on live assessment of conditions
  - It should be noted that Council does not make assessments on regional Fire Danger Ratings, or subsequent adjustments to roadside Fire Danger Rating signage. These activities are controlled and monitored by the Queensland Fire & Emergency Services, with data supplied by the Bureau of Meteorology as a State Government responsibility.
- Maintaining a close working relationship with Queensland Fire & Emergency Services and other disaster management agencies
- Developing and implementing fire management plans for individual reserves on an annual basis
- Developing and maintaining a network of fire trails, fire breaks and fuel reduced areas
- Conducting annual assessments of fire fuel loads and risk
- Implementing measures to reduce risk on Council lands including the use of hazard reduction burns and mechanical fuel reduced areas
- Educating park visitors through on ground signage, Council's website and other means
- Land use planning

### Resourcing & Capabilities

Council will endeavour to resource fire management strategies, programs and actions as required to meet Council's community obligations as a responsible land manager, legal responsibilities under relevant legislation and duty of care.

In addition, Council will support the Fire Management Program by appropriate training of Council personnel to fulfil their respective roles.

## **FIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

Council will take an integrated and planned approach to fire management based on current research, knowledge and best practice bushland fire management objectives and techniques. Key to this process will be Council's relationship with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service and participation in the Queensland Fire & Biodiversity Consortium.

### **Research**

Council will use relevant fire management research from recognised fire/land management agencies and research organisations such as the Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium as the basis for best practice fire management.

Where deemed relevant and appropriate, Council may engage with research institutions, fire authorities and consultancies to undertake fire-based research in the Natural Area Estate to inform natural area planning and management programs.

### **Fire Management Planning**

A detailed Fire Management Strategic Plan has been developed and will be reviewed for all Conservation Estates and Conservation Reserves within the Natural Area Estate on a 5-year cycle. Plans will be implemented through the annual Fire Management Program.

The Strategic Plan contains the following key elements:

- Legislative requirements associated with fire
- Description of reserve features and natural values
- Reserve vegetation & values mapping
- Fire infrastructure planner and mapping
- Schedule of implementation actions
- Identification of hazard reduction mechanisms
- Prescribed burn plan
- Relevant standards, protocols etc.

Fire management in local reserves will be addressed by incorporation of fire planning and management principles and strategies in reserve specific maintenance maps.

### **Fire Infrastructure**

Council will establish and maintain appropriate infrastructure on its lands to provide safe access for fire management and protect built and natural assets, human life and property. Environmental assessments will be conducted for the development of new fire infrastructure. Fire infrastructure may include fire trails, fire breaks, keyed gates, fire specific signage and access to water sources.

### **Fuel Reduced Areas (FRA's)**

To complement burns and to contribute to fire mitigation infrastructure Council will create and maintain Fuel Reduced Areas. These are areas where fuel in the form of vegetation is physically managed and if required removed through slashing, pruning and other mechanical means to create breaks or low fuel areas to control and mitigate risk presented by a spreading wildfire.

### **Prescribed Burn Program**

Prescribed burns, as directed by the Fire Management Program, will be used to consolidate the management requirements for hazard reduction and biodiversity maintenance.

Prescribed burning is defined as the controlled application of fire under specified environmental conditions to a predetermined area and at the time, intensity and rate of spread required to attain planned resource management objectives.

Council will engage appropriately qualified and skilled contractors to conduct its prescribed burns.

### **Hazard Reduction Burning**

Prescribed fires for hazard reduction purposes will be used to reduce fire fuel loads and reduce the risk, impact and severity of wildfire and its associated threat to life and property. Hazard reduction burns will also aim to achieve sound ecological outcomes and minimise impacts on local and regional air quality. Specific prescribed burn requirements will be determined on an annual basis subject to criteria including past fire history, weather, fuel load and risk.

### **Fire Ecology**

As part of sound ecological management of Council's Natural Area Estate, prescribed fire will be applied as a management tool to achieve ecological objectives. This may include manipulation of the fire season and regime to achieve a range of objectives including pest plant control, stimulation of native vegetation or protection of fire sensitive species and habitats. Specific prescribed burn requirements will be determined based on ecological requirements, fire history, season and weather.

### **Notifications**

Council will notify relevant adjoining landholders and other relevant agencies of prescribed burns as required under the *Act*. Additional notifications may take the form of public notices and information posted on Council's website.

### **Wildfire Preparedness**

Council will maintain a Natural Area Estate visitor and fire management decision matrix to guide and direct preparedness levels for Council's wildfire response systems and personnel. In addition, the schedule will advise Natural Area Estate fire safety actions including visitor access, permits and area restrictions.

In the event of a Catastrophic fire danger rating Council Procedure – Temporary Closure of a Park or Reserve will be implemented for full or partial closures of all Conservation Estates and Reserves.

## **Wildfire Control**

Council will give the highest priority to responding to wildfire in the Natural Area Estate and fulfilling its obligations under the *Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990*. Council will support the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service as the lead agency in their response with the primary objective of rapidly containing and controlling fire.

In support of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service, Council will assist by facilitating Natural Area Estate access, providing bulk water, equipment and on ground knowledge as required on a case-by-case basis. Environmental protection will be given due considerations once any threat to life and property have been removed.

## **7. Roles and Responsibilities**

Environment and Sustainability Branch – ownership and updates of the Fire Management Program within the Natural Area Estate and technical supporting documents. Ownership for the planning and delivery of the annual fire reduction and prescribed burn programs.

Works and Field Services Branch – support on ground delivery and/or oversight of fire management through maintaining fire mitigation infrastructure and contractor management of fire risk around offset plantings etc.

## **8. Key Stakeholders**

The following will be consulted during the review process:

- Environment and Sustainability Branch
- Works and Field Services Branch

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential to achieving successful outcomes in fire management and will be incorporated into all program areas and levels. Key delivery areas within the fire management program will include:

- *Program level audits conducted by external parties*
- *Reserve level audits of fire management plan implementation*
- *Ad hoc activity audits as determined through annual works planning*
- *Monitoring and evaluation of fuel load accumulation annually at permanent plots*
- *Monitoring and evaluation of post fire biodiversity response*
- *Monitoring and evaluation of fire history (planned and wildfire)*

## **10. Definitions**

No clarification on definitions are required within this policy.

## **11. Policy Owner**

The General Manager (Infrastructure and Environment) is the policy owner and the Manager Environment and Sustainability is responsible for authoring and reviewing this policy