

Review of State map of bushfire prone areas and vegetation

On 7 December, 2015 the WA State Government released a package of reforms aimed at protecting people and property from the threat of bushfire.

This included the central and key element in the reforms, the state-wide Map of Bushfire-Prone Areas (the Map).

The Map identifies areas of Western Australia that have been designated as bushfire-prone by the order of the Fire and Emergency Services (FES) Commissioner.

The Map is prepared, maintained and administered by the Office of Bushfire Risk Management (OBRM) within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

The Map can be viewed online at:

www.dfes.wa.gov.au

OBRM's designation of land or lots as bushfire-prone on the Map reflects the proximity to vegetation (within 100 metres) with a bushfire fuel loading/bushfire attack level (BAL) generally above BAL-12.5 (equates to a radiant heat energy exposure of 12.5 kilowatts per square metre).

The radiant heat energy exposure released by a bushfire can be caused by many types of vegetation including bushland (forest, woodland and scrublands), grassland or crops, in addition to other vegetation types and fuel sources.

As a property designated as bushfire-prone on the Map has potential to be impacted by a bushfire event, the State Government requires land use planning and building assessment processes account for the bushfire risk and to mitigate the risks and potential impacts through planning and building controls.

OBRM has committed to reviewing and

overseeing updates to the Map every 12 months.

It will review the Map in consultation with local governments and State Government agencies.

To maintain the currency of the Map, OBRM will seek local governments to monitor and review information on bushfire-prone vegetation every year. Circumstances where OBRM may review the map include:

- Where there is no apparent bushfire-prone vegetation;
- Where there are inconsistencies between the Map and a local government's knowledge and information about the bushfire hazards that exist at a point in time;
- Where an area is proposed to be used in a way that increases fuel loads such as the revegetation of wetlands or foreshore reserves.

OBRM has formulated a Mapping Standard for Bushfire Prone Areas guideline document to assist in undertaking the annual reviews.

The document includes methodology for identifying bushfire-prone vegetation.

The document can be obtained from:

www.dfes.wa.gov.au

Landowners, the general public and developers may wish to provide input to OBRM's annual review of the Map to ensure that it accurately identifies bushfire hazards in the City of Armadale.

The City will review public and industry requests it receives and will provide the requests and its recommendations to OBRM.

THE “PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE” AND THE MAP OF BUSHFIRE-PRONE AREAS

OBRMS’s Mapping Standard for Bushfire Prone Areas strongly recommends application of the Precautionary Principle when identifying any vegetation that is potentially bushfire-prone.

If it is not absolutely clear (or where uncertainty exists about) whether a vegetated area meets the criteria for bushfire-prone identification, OBRM considers it preferable to take a cautionary approach by identifying vegetation as bushfire-prone, unless it is highly certain that the hazard risk is low, which is generally accepted as less than BAL-12.5.

REQUESTING AMENDMENTS TO THE MAP OF BUSHFIRE-PRONE AREAS

OBRM has advised that reviews of the Map will be undertaken on an annual basis.

OBRM requests that those landowners, members of the public and/or industry members who wish to have the Map amended at an annual review submit a written request to the local government/s where the land is located.

The City will accept submitted requests for review at any time during the year and can also submit amendment requests to OBRM at any time, however OBRM will only consider those requests during the annual review process for the Map.

Requests should be lodged with the City by **1 November each year** so that OBRM can consider the request prior to finalising the annual review in May of the following year.

Written requests for amendment of the Map submitted to the City should, at minimum, include the following information:

1. Full name of the landowner or person submitting the request.
2. Full contact details including postal address, email address and phone number.
3. A plan and accurate address information to clearly identify the land area/lots the subject of the request.
4. A detailed statement describing the reasons for the request together with a hazard analysis or information supporting the request.

The City may require further detailed supporting information to be lodged to justify a particular request.

A field assessment by a person with suitable qualifications to undertake vegetation/hazard level assessments for bushfire risk may be required where the site or situation does not yield a clear answer through a desktop review and the available supporting information.

CITY OF ARMADALE ANNUAL REVIEW PROCESS

Each year OBRM will liaise with the City and other local governments to progress the review.

OBRM will assess and determine any submitted requests and will then update and publish the amended Map.

The amended Map will only incorporate changes to bushfire-prone vegetation areas that OBRM determines to be valid.

Amendments will only take effect through the FES Commissioner's annual gazettal of the Map.

The review process in no way alters any statutory requirements or processes that may be triggered by the designation of a site as bushfire-prone by the Map currently endorsed by the order of the Fire and Emergency Services (FES) Commissioner.

The general process that the City follows in order to provide comments to OBRM for each annual review is outlined as follows:

1. The City will publish general information about the annual review undertaken by OBRM (i.e. this information sheet) on the City's website.
2. Landowners, members of the public and industry members may submit written requests to the City for review of bushfire-prone vegetation in accordance with OBRM and the City's requirements at any time during the year.
3. OBRM will write to the City in August each year to initiate the annual review of the Map for its local government area, and provide access to vegetation data in September.
4. OBRM will give the City at least 60 days to review the data for its local government area. The City will undertake a desktop review of the bushfire-prone status of land in its local government area, and consider requests it has received throughout the year.
5. The City will refer comments and recommendations for changes to the Map to OBRM for its consideration, including

any requests that the City has received from landowners, developers, or the public. OBRM require the City's response (including OBRM's Data Amendment Request Form) to be submitted for determination before the end of January the year following OBRM's August commencement of the annual review.

OBRM will review the requested updates and submitted information for the City's local government area, in consultation with the City, relevant State agencies and Landgate.

The Director of OBRM will arbitrate a final decision on any differences of opinion between the parties in respect to the bushfire hazard level of vegetation.

OBRM and Landgate will prepare the draft amended Map by the end of April each year, with OBRM declaring a final version and providing it to the FES Commissioner during May of each year.

The final version of the Map becomes operational through an order by the FES Commissioner published in the Government Gazette. The Map remains in force and has statutory effect, until OBRM republishes an updated/revised Map in May of each year.

The schematic flow-chart of the Annual Review process (prepared by OBRM) provides a general indicative set out and timing of the review process. The flow-chart is included in Appendix 2 of the Mapping Standards for Bushfire Prone Areas accessed from:

www.dfes.wa.gov.au

PLEASE NOTE: The City should receive all requests for changes to the Map by 1 November each year to allow for OBRM's consideration of the subsequent revised and updated Map republished in May of the following year. All requests for changes to the Map received by this date will be considered by the City and forwarded to OBRM with a recommendation by the end of the following January. The FES Commissioner determines any updates made in respect to the revised Map. Please note that the City of Armadale is not a decision-making authority in respect to the Map.