

## Extreme weather events and communities workshop, focusing on fire

By Su Wild-River

Local Land Services is off to a sizzling start in its development of an Natural Resource Climate Change Adaptation Study. On 1 May Kristy Moyle ran the first of a series of workshops to build Natural Resource Management (NRM) capacity into climate change resilience.

Kristy ran the workshop with colleagues Brent Jacobs and Louise Boronyak both from the University of Technology Sydney Institute for Sustainable Futures together with Peat Leath from the University of Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture. The aim was to learn how the Palarang community copes with extreme weather events. Twelve community members attended from different volunteer and community agencies, giving personal perspectives on bushfires and natural resource management.

The research team is using the NSW Emergency Management Cycle as a framework to guide their analysis. The cycle was developed to protect people and property from extreme events and covers the four PPRR stages:

- Plan,
- Prepare,
- Respond,
- Recover.

The workshop focused on bushfire threats to NRM because the Palarang region has a high level of exposure to bushfire risks. This will likely increase due to climate change in the future. It is anticipated that a combination of wetter summers and autumns than could increase the fuel load before warmer, dryer springs and summers.

The lively discussion moved across each of the four PPRR stages. Participants were asked to examine the stages considering how much time is spent in each part of the cycle and how we know which stage we are in.

We talked about how the community learns about fire risk and what we do to respond. There was a sense of reduced neighbourly interactions due to more absentee landholders and new people moving in from big cities. The internet and radio were described as generally being sketchy and even more likely to

drop out during emergencies, making them poor substitutes for community networks.

Regardless of whether your family has been here for generations, or if you are new to the landscape, some

- Local radio station, 98.5FM, relays information from the ABC stations during emergencies.
- Mongarlowe Fire Brigade also has a phone tree which extends outside its geographic area.

knowledge is hard to get. Even the most motivated people struggle for good advice on setting up a comprehensive home and asset sprinkler system. And it is hard for anyone to maintain momentum when the bushfire smoke leaves the sky. This was discussed at the workshop: about 90 people attended Mongarlowe fire briefings as the Eastern Budawang's burned over 6000Ha last Spring. But only 20 or so regularly and actively participate during the rest of the year.

The workshop was a good reminder that now is the time for bushfire prevention. One option is to book in with the Rural Fire Service State Mitigation Crew who will come out and help with a Fire Preparedness Plan. You can book on-line, but there's a long waiting list - Mongarlowe for example, has only been able to have three Plans completed to date. The local Fire Mitigation Officer can also help but has a pretty long list of people applying for assistance. There's heaps of great information on-line, and there are no really good reasons for not having a [Bushfire Survival Plan](#). But how many of us do?

The table shows some ideas for enhancing natural resource resilience to fire.

Stage	Signs	Possible Actions
Prevent	Not bushfire season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant fire retardant species in wind breaks, not wind tunnels.</li> <li>• Install a sprinkler system for assets, and static water sources for fires. Remember to provide for plants and animals when planning water resources.</li> </ul>
Prepare	Smoke in the sky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put out water for native animals</li> <li>• Wet down key habitat areas where possible.</li> </ul>
Respond	Flames approaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep water and refuges available for native animals if possible.</li> </ul>
Recover	Fire is out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look out for injured wildlife and provide care if needed through <a href="#">WIRES</a>.</li> <li>• Put out spot fires around key refuge areas.</li> <li>• Re-seed burned grasslands for erosion control with non-invasive species.</li> <li>• Identify and manage new, emergent weed species.</li> </ul>