

Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings

Title:	Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings Policy
Type:	Council
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Attachments:	Nil

Acknowledgement of Country

Murrindindi Shire Council is proud to acknowledge the Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the traditional owners of the land we now call Murrindindi Shire.

We pay our respects to First Nations leaders and elders, past, present and emerging, who are the keepers of history, traditions, knowledge and culture of this land.

We commit to working in collaboration with traditional owners of this land in a spirit of reconciliation and partnership.

1 Purpose

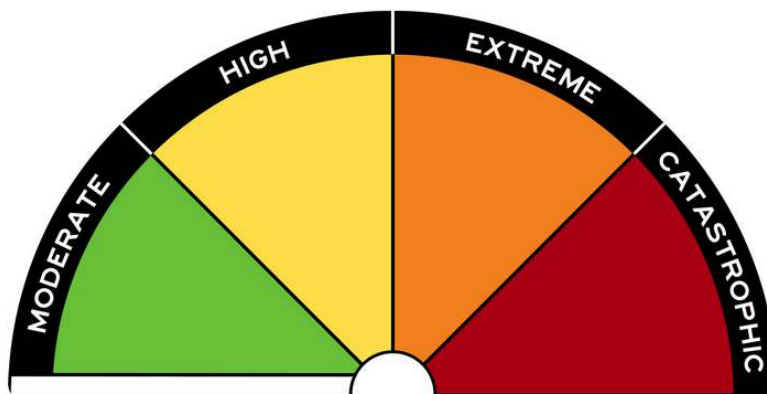
The Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings Policy (Policy) outlines changes to Council's service provision to the community on days predicted to pose the highest fire danger risks to the public.

2 Rationale

2.1 Fire Danger Ratings

Fire danger ratings describe the potential level of danger should a bushfire start. They are important because they provide people with information to take action to protect themselves and others from the potentially dangerous impacts of bushfires.

Four levels of fire danger ratings communicate the level of bushfire risk – from moderate to catastrophic. 'No rating' may be shown when there is low risk, during the fire season.



Australian fire danger rating scale

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2.2 Fire Behaviour Index

The Fire Behaviour Index (FBI) is a simple numerical scale that is used consistently across Australia, allowing users to make decisions that require finer detail than the four Fire Danger Rating categories allow. The FBI runs from 0 to 100 and beyond, with increasingly higher values indicating increasingly dangerous fire behaviour and therefore fire danger risk.

The FBI is split into step-up categories to support decision making for fire operations. Each step represents a transition in fire behaviour, such as a significant change in potential fire spread, suppression difficulty or the expected scale of impact to life and property

AFDRS		
FDR (Public Rating)	FBI	FBI Descriptor
No rating	0-11	Fire self-extinguishing to typical controlled burning conditions
Moderate	12-23	Fires typically suppressed with offensive fire management strategies
High	24-49	Increasing focus on defensive suppression strategies
Extreme	50-99	Increased likelihood of community loss and significant consequences
Catastrophic	100+	High probability of loss of life and property

2.3 Areas of Fire Danger in Murrindindi Shire

Except for the central urban areas of Yea and Alexandra, the Murrindindi Shire is predominantly classified as bushfire prone. Consequently, it is anticipated that the public will be on heightened alert on days with the highest FDRs and vigilant for information that assists them in their contingency planning. It is therefore important that information is readily available to the public on Council's preparedness and service availability on such days to aid individual decision making.

Such information is important as Council will operate with altered or reduced service levels on Catastrophic days (and may do so on days predicted to be of Extreme fire danger with an FBI of 75+) for the following reasons:

- large areas within the Shire are considered to be of high bushfire risk;
- the need to ensure Council's operations do not unintentionally cause a fire to start;
- the need to provide for the safety of Council staff and to ensure that the public is not placed in situations of undue risk when travelling to and accessing Council services;
- to ensure sufficient staff resources can be re-deployed to emergency response planning functions and, in the event of a fire event, provision of support to fire combating agencies and emergency relief centres; and
- the likelihood that some staff will take approved leave on such days to attend to family arrangements and to enact personal bushfire survival plans.

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This Policy therefore addresses Council's responsibility to plan and manage for the provision of services and Council information on days with the highest fire danger risks to maximise employee and community safety, whilst ensuring appropriate emergency responses can be enacted as required.

3 Scope

This Policy applies to all Councillors, employees, contractors, committees and volunteers engaged in Council Business.

This Policy is in operation during the Fire Danger Period as declared by the CFA. The dates of the Fire Danger Period are available from the CFA website and may vary from year to year due to seasonal variation in environmental conditions and rainfall but generally fall between October/November to April/May the following year.

This Policy will apply on all Catastrophic Fire Danger days. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) may also enact parts of this Policy on days with an Extreme Fire Danger Rating, and in particular those days with an FBI of 75+

4 Definitions

Reference Term	Definition
Fire Behaviour Index (FBI)	The fire behaviour index (FBI) is a scale of potential fire behaviour. It ranges from zero to 100-plus. Fire agencies use the FBI to inform decisions about the fire danger rating for a district, along with information about other conditions.
Fire Danger Period (FDP)	Period of time when the CFA restricts use of fire in the community and is declared for each municipality at the commencement of the fire season.
Fire Danger Ratings (FDR)	Indicators of how dangerous a fire would be on a particular day if one started and how hard it would be to put out.
Total Fire Ban	A Total Fire Ban sets the legal restrictions on what activities can and cannot occur, with the aim to reduce activities that may start a fire. If a Total Fire Ban has not been declared, fire restrictions may still apply for each municipality. Total Fire Bans are normally declared by 5 pm on the day before a ban but can be declared or revoked at any time.

5 Policy

5.1 Non-essential Travel and Council Meetings

All travel for Council business on Catastrophic Days involving Councillors, staff, contractors or volunteers will be kept to an absolute minimum. Travel for the delivery of essential services will be subject to Manager approval. All non-essential travel and meetings will be suspended.

Consequently, several services that typically involve extensive travel to remote sites or through bushfire prone areas will be suspended. These include all mobile library services and non-essential property inspection services associated with planning, building, health and infrastructure approvals.

Council's Community Safety unit will continue to respond to emergency callouts, where there is imminent danger to human life, or as directed by their manager. All non-essential patrols and inspection services will be temporarily postponed.

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Due to the extensive travel that may be required by Council personnel and members of the public, any meetings of Council that are scheduled on a Catastrophic Day will be cancelled and re-scheduled or where possible, held virtually. In addition, any scheduled meetings of Delegated Community Asset Committees or Council appointed Advisory Committees will also be cancelled and re-scheduled or where possible, held virtually.

5.2 Customer Service Centres and Libraries

Council will, as far as practicable, maintain access to customer services from the Alexandra, Kinglake and Yea Council offices on Catastrophic Days. Murrindindi Library services will also, where practicable, operate during normal opening hours at the Alexandra, Kinglake and Yea Libraries. In accordance with the suggested approach regarding non-essential travel, the Mobile Library and Customer Service Van will not operate on Code Red Days.

5.3 Infrastructure Works and Waste Management

To minimise the risk of unintentionally starting a fire and to avoid non-essential travel all infrastructure maintenance operations and capital works will be suspended on Catastrophic Days, with staff enacting emergency standby arrangements. Similarly, all Resource Recovery Centres and the Council's landfill site will be closed to the public.

Council's kerbside waste and recycling collection service contractors advise that collection services will generally be maintained on Catastrophic Days, with some services commencing earlier on the day. Collection services would cease in the event of perceived or immediate risk from fire activity.

5.4 Recreation, Parks and Pools

The Alexandra and Yea swimming pools will remain open during normal hours of operation on Catastrophic Days, subject to qualified staff being available, as these pools are not located in bushfire prone areas. The Eildon and Marysville pools will be closed.

Council managed outdoor recreation reserves, parks and the Great Victorian Rail Trail will remain open on Catastrophic days, with visitors to these facilities encouraged to be vigilant for fire warning messages from emergency services and avoid these areas where possible.

5.5 Community Services

Some Community Services will be suspended or altered on Catastrophic Days. Family Day Care will operate in accordance with Department of Education and Training directives to local primary and secondary education facilities and their individual bushfire survival plans. Childcare will continue to be offered, subject to educator availability, in Eildon, Alexandra and Yea. Services based in areas where local schools are directed to close on Catastrophic Days will not operate.

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Services in Yea and Alexandra will operate as normal subject to staff availability. MCH Services will not operate in other areas including Eildon, Toolangi, Marysville, Kinglake and Flowerdale, due to the travel involved and the elevated bushfire risk in these areas.

Council will work closely with local community service organisations to ensure that vulnerable persons on the Vulnerable Persons Register are contacted to raise awareness of the fire danger and assess their welfare.

5.6 Communications

It is possible that service levels could change from those listed above at short notice due to the prevailing conditions, the presence of a fire emergency and/or lack of available staff on the day. Therefore, Council will, wherever possible, issue media releases outlining its services available on

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Catastrophic Days. Council's website and Facebook page will be updated regularly concerning the availability of Council services prior to and on Catastrophic Days. Council will also utilise the services of UGFM Local Community Radio (an emergency broadcaster) to issue bulletins where possible.

6 Related Policies, Strategies and Legislation

- Murrindindi Shire Council Municipal Emergency Management Plan – Section 5.4.4 – Public Information and Warning – 20/25021
- Emergency Management Policy – 21/4987
- Health and Wellbeing Policy (18/82375)
- Occupational Health and Safety Policy (18/13509)
- Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings (22/99430)
- Ultraviolet Radiation (UV) and Working in Seasonal Heat Policy (21/75585)
- Enterprise Risk Management Policy (22/13621)
- Flexible work policy (20/56354)
- Community and Defence Services Leave Policy (20/27855)

7 Council Plan

The Policy relates to the Council Plan 2021-2025 Strategic Objective to improve emergency readiness through active emergency management planning to enhance community preparedness and resilience.

8 Management and Review

Implementation of this Policy is the responsibility of all Departmental Managers under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer and/or Directors, until such time as the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) is enacted which may override this Policy during declared emergencies.

The Policy will be reviewed by the Director Corporate and Shared Services in September 2025.

9 Consultation

There has been no community consultation undertaken in development of this Policy.

10 Human Rights Charter

This Policy has been developed with consideration of the requirements under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Of relevance to this policy, the following rights were considered

- Right to recognition and equality before the law (Section 8)
- Right to life (Section 9)
- Right to Freedom of Movement (Section 12)
- Right to protection of families and children (Section 17)
- Property Rights (Section 20)
- Right to liberty and security of person (Section 21)
- Right to Humane Treatment when deprived of liberty (Section 22)

11 Gender Impact Assessment

This policy has been developed/reviewed with consideration of the criteria which inspires equality under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. Consideration has been given to

- gender neutral language,
- whether any sections of the policy require different access to encourage gender equity, additional needs of those with disability or from different cultural, age, religious backgrounds
- changes to community services during high risk days and their impact on vulnerable community members