

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings Policy</b>
<b>Type:</b>	<b>Council</b>
<b>Last Adopted:</b>	15 December 2021
<b>File No:</b>	21/104009
<b>Attachments:</b>	Nil

### 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

Fire Danger Ratings, issued by the Bureau of Meteorology in consultation with fire agencies, predict how dangerous a fire would be if one started. The higher the rating, the more likely a fire will be dangerous. More information on fire danger ratings and preparedness can be found on the CFA website.

A Code Red Rating is the highest Fire Danger Rating, followed by ratings of Extreme and Severe. On Code Red Days the Country Fire Authority (CFA) advises people living in high risk bushfire areas to leave the area the night before or early in the morning and to enact their bushfire survival plans.

Fire Danger Ratings are usually forecast up to four days in advance enabling some level of preparation.

With the exception of the central urban areas of Yea and Alexandra, the Murrindindi Shire is predominantly classified by the State Government as bushfire prone. Consequently, it is anticipated that the public will be on heightened alert on days with the highest Fire Danger Ratings 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 Code Red Days (and may do so on days predicted to be of Severe or Extreme fire danger based on local conditions and/or advice from emergency services) for the following reasons:

- large areas within the Shire considered to be of high bushfire risk;
- a need to ensure Council's operations do not unintentionally cause a fire to start;
- a 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
- a likelihood that some staff will take approved leave on such days to attend to family arrangements and to enact personal bushfire survival plans.

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 in order to maximise employee and community safety, whilst ensuring appropriate emergency responses can be enacted as required.

## Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings

**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 Code Red days. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) may also enact parts of this Policy on days with a Severe or Extreme Fire Danger Rating.

**4. Definitions**

Reference Term	Definition
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. Fire Danger Ratings are dependent on weather conditions and fuel load. Fire Danger Ratings are forecast for four days in advance.
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****Non-essential Travel and Council Meetings**

All travel for Council business on Code Red 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.

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 Code Red 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.

## Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings

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 Code Red Days. Murrindindi Library services will also, where practicable, operate during normal opening hours at the Alexandra, Kinglake and Yea locations. In accordance with the suggested approach regarding non-essential travel, the Mobile Library and Customer Service Van will not operate on Code Red Days.

Infrastructure Works and Waste Management

In order 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 Code Red 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 Code Red Days, with some services commencing earlier on the day. Collection services would cease in the event of perceived or immediate risk from fire activity.

Recreation, Parks and Pools

The Alexandra and Yea swimming pools will remain open during normal hours of operation on Code Red 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 Code Red days, with visitors to these facilities encouraged to be vigilant for fire warning messages from emergency services and avoid these areas where possible.

Community Services

Some Community Services will be suspended or altered on Code Red 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. Child care 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 Code Red 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.

Communications

The above represents Council's intended service levels on Code Red Days, and this may apply to days of Severe or Extreme Fire Danger as determined by the CEO. 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 Code Red Days. Council's website and Facebook page will be updated regularly concerning the availability of Council services prior to and on Code Red 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

## Service Provision and Fire Danger Ratings

- Employee Fire Danger Period Policy - 13/6824
- Community and Defence Services Leave Policy – 20/27855
- Health and Wellbeing Policy – 19/29847
- Enterprise Risk Management Policy – 19/59313
- Occupational Health and Safety Policy – 20/35627
- Ultraviolet Radiation (UV) and Working in Seasonal Heat Policy – 18/58997

### **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.