

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

Key Topics:

- decision making [1]
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Social, economic, and environmental impacts of the 2012/13 Victorian fire season [4]

This project was commissioned and funded entirely by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria.

Project: detail Notabs

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Description

This project was commissioned and funded entirely by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria.

The objective of this project was to determine social, economic and environmental impacts of the major 2012/13 Victorian bushfires.

Victoria has experienced many major bushfires and bushfire seasons, causing significant social, economic and environmental impacts.

Consolidated assessment of many of these events/seasons (1983 Ash Wednesday, 2002/03 Alpine, 2005/06 fires, 2006/07 Great Divide and other fires and 2008/09 Black Saturday and other fires) has been undertaken (Stephenson, C July 2010.) The impacts, losses and benefits sustained from five severe bushfire in south eastern Australia (Research Report 88) following the development of a framework to allow the comparative assessment of damage and losses (Stephenson, C July 2010). A literature review of the economic, social and environmental impacts of severe bushfires in south eastern Australia (Research Report 87).

Severe fire impacts extend beyond suppression costs and evident losses. They also include significant social, economic and environmental costs that are direct (primary) and immediate, as well as indirect (secondary and tertiary) and long lasting.

Social impacts include possible fatalities and injury, but also physiological trauma, and loss of social structures and cohesion which may last for years, if not tens of years. Cultural and social assets and infra-structures are also threatened and impacted by fire.

Economic impacts are wide ranging, and include immediate losses, rebuilding and recovery costs, as well as ongoing industry impacts such as reduced timber, water and honey yields from forests and parks, (and associated secondary production), reduction of critical services (power, water, communications), loss of agricultural crops stock, reduction of tourism revenues and smoke taint in grapes. Ongoing effects also include diminishing market position and reputation built up over many years.

Environmental impacts have social and environmental consequences, and where ecosystem services have a human value and function that can be financially valued, they should be considered as a subset of economic values. Environmental values of most importance are those which that agricultural or ecosystem diversity and function (underpinning productivity and processes), or place them at medium to longer term risk of this occurring.

In 2013 Victoria experienced a moderately severe fire season which included over 900 fires, 200,000 hectares burnt and loss of three lives (two firefighters and one member of the public). Most of these impacts were the result of several major bushfires including the Harrietville, Grampians, Aberfeldy and other fires; and impacted on local and regional communities and infrastructure.

In the development of the initial social, economic and environmental assessment framework and summaries a number of potential improvements were identified. This included methods for the improved assessment of industry and economic impacts, and the assessment of ecological service costs.

This project aimed to assess and summarise the impact of the major bushfires and fire season of 2012/13 as an addendum chapter to research Report 88. This study aimed to more fully assess the economic impact of three of these major bushfires (Harrietville, Grampians and Aberfeldy) on regional (and major local) industries and economies particularly the regional tourism and grape and wine industry impacts. This included the development of a sound and useable economic impacts assessment framework.

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