

# 2022 – 2023 BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS (VEGETATION) PROGRAM FACTSHEET

## Factsheet

### INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government has committed to the continuation of the Bushfire Preparedness Vegetation Program (BPVP).

\$9.15 million has been allocated towards the 2022-23 BPVP. This allocation is intended to deliver essential bushfire vegetation clearance works at government schools **prior to the 2022-23 bushfire season** (as indicated by your municipality's 2022-23 Fire Danger Period).

Schools identified as being at risk of bushfires are recorded in the Bushfire at Risk Register (BARR). The BARR is based on Victoria's Bushfire Prone Area designations (<http://services.land.vic.gov.au/maps/bushfire.jsp>) and other information sources including the Bushfire Management Overlay; Victorian Fire Risk Register; terrain and fuel type exposure.

As a recipient school of bushfire vegetation clearance funding as part of the 2022-23 Bushfire Preparedness (Vegetation) Program allocation, you will receive a letter from the Department of Education and Training stating the funding amount and actions required.

This document provides relevant information on how schools can utilise Bushfire Preparedness (vegetation) Program (BPVP) funding by 30 September 2022 (before typical bushfire season) and acquit it **by 1 November 2022**.

Please note that not utilising the provided funding and undertaking these important works may be taken into account when assessing applications for future grant programs.

### BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS (VEGETATION) PROGRAM – GUIDELINES

As a BARR school, you are required to undertake vegetation clearance activities on a regular basis to mitigate the risk of harm to your school community and your school buildings in the event of a bushfire.

For a NEW condition of funding BARR schools must **demonstrate appropriate planning for bushfire mitigation** by ensuring you have a basic Vegetation Management Plan VMP (or equivalent) and including it with your acquittal.

- A free, basic, three-year VMP is offered to all BARR schools through our School Support Program (SSP) visits, by a Bushfire Planning and Design (BPAD) Level 2 practitioner.
- All BARR schools will receive an SSP visit during August to October 2022 (and be provided with a VMP), unless you were already visited through the SSP in 2020-21 or in 2021-22, in which case you will already have a current VMP.
- A school may be exempted from the BPVP SSP visit if they can provide evidence of their own VMP equivalent that has been authored by a BPAD2 qualified practitioner and that reasonably addresses the guidelines within this BPVP Factsheet.

Schools are encouraged to

- act quickly in July / August to secure/book contractors prior to the bushfire season and, in particular, for the September school holidays;
- utilise, if needed, expertise of one or more suitable partners who, depending on the locality, who may be able to assist, including:
  - Country Fire Authority (local) Support Officer;
  - Municipal Fire Prevention Officer;
  - Regional DET Security and Emergency Management staff;
  - Qualified arborist; and
  - A Bushfire Planning and Design (BPAD) 2 level practitioner.
- consider the need to schedule and budget for **ongoing** (regular/annual) works such as grass management and gutters management as well as **one-off** works such as large tree removal works; and
- if you are planning to undertake major one-off works (costing between \$10,000 and \$30,000), you may be entitled to one-off (contingency) funds above your nominal allocation. If you have such plans, you are asked to contact the VSBA at [bushfire@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfire@education.vic.gov.au), prior to commencing those works to discuss and request access to the one-off (contingency) funds.

Work tasks should be undertaken that will prioritise and maximise preparedness for

- your designated Shelter in Place (SIP);
- other school buildings;
- evacuation (egress) routes; and
- a secondary assembly point.

The types of specific tasks you should be undertaking are:

- The school site must be slashed or cleared of all flammable undergrowth such as dry grass and vegetation to the site boundary unless it is greater than 50m from buildings, evacuation routes and evacuation locations.
- A fuel reduced zone must be established around buildings (20 metres as a guide) consistent with the following requirements:

Grass, leaves and debris

- Grass must be short cropped and maintained during the declared fire danger period;
- All leaves and vegetation debris (including stockpiled leaves, pruning, dead limbs and trees) must be removed at regular intervals during the declared fire danger period;
- Rooves and roof gutters are clear of leaves, twigs and branches;
- Remove other flammable elements and prune lower limbs of established trees (check with local council before removing trees)
- Within 10 metres of a building, flammable objects must not be located close to the vulnerable parts of the building;
- Plants greater than 10 centimetres in height must not be placed within 3 metres of a window or glass feature of the building;

Shrubs and Trees

- Shrubs must not be located under the canopy of trees;
- Thick, continuous shrubs or other vegetation contacting building walls or directly under windows be removed;
- Individual and clumps of shrubs must not exceed 5 square metres in area and must be separated by at least 5 metres;
- Large trees that are taller than 10 m be situated at greater distance than their height from the Shelter in Place building;
- Trees or branches over-hanging or touching buildings and sheds be removed or trimmed to a height of 2 metres from building rooflines and 2 metres clear of buildings;
- The canopy of trees must be separated by at least 5 metres; and
- There must be a clearance of at least 2 metres between the lowest tree branches and ground level.

- The fuel reduced zone not have plantings that are dense and typical of bushland settings ([Landscaping for Bushfire](#) provides information and ways to appropriately manage vegetation around buildings; additional advice may be available from CFA Community Safety in regional offices and CFA Headquarters);
- Should the school meet the fuel reduced zone requirements listed above, the school may also utilise the BPVP grant to remove or replace other combustible elements, for example woodchip surfacing, brushwood screening, timber fencing, timber retaining walls;
- Please note that if a school wishes to engage the professional services of a bushfire attack expert to assist with the development of a (multi-year) vegetation management plan (for an amount that does not exceed 30% of its 2022-23 nominal allocation), this would be an appropriate use of the BPVP funding and would be viewed favourably.

## PROGRAM TIMELINES

Task	Date
Schools receive first BPVP 2022-23 payment (80%) and notification	June 2022
Planning / scheduling of works	July onward
Schools undertake BPVP 2022-23 works	From Aug 2022
* Schools considering larger one-off arborist works contact VSBA	Aug - Nov 2022
Schools complete most works prior to bushfire danger period	By 30 Sept 2022
Schools complete acquittal process	By 1 Nov 2022
Schools receive second payment (up to remaining 20%)	On evidence of acquittal
Schools undertake any necessary small additional seasonal works	Jan - Feb 2023

## PROCUREMENT OF CONTRACTORS TO UNDERTAKE THESE WORKS

- Schools are required to be compliant with Government procurement procedures as stipulated in the Procurement of Low-value Construction Works or Services Policy. This includes providing **at least one quote for works under \$50,000**, although the VSBA recommends seeking multiple quotes (where possible) to ensure value for money.
- When providing quotes as part of the acquittal process, you will attest that **there are no conflicts of interest held in relation to the contractor who has completed the works**. For example if the supplier is a member of the family of someone working at your school.

## PAYMENT AND ACQUITTAL OF FUNDING

Please note that **not utilising the provided funding and undertaking these important works may be taken into account when assessing applications for future grant programs**.

The VSBA will be paying grants to schools for the delivery of vegetation clearance over two stages:

### **Stage 1: Receive 80 per cent of funding. Implement works.**

You will receive 80 per cent of your notional allocation upfront in order to implement the required works.

### **Stage 2: Acquittal and receipt of up to 20 per cent of funding.**

Schools will shortly be provided a link to logon to the SmartyGrants system and complete an acquittal form.

### **Acquittal Requirements**

The following documentation needs to be attached to the acquittal form to demonstrate each item of expenditure is eligible under the program:

- **An itemised cost estimate (quote)**
- **A receipt of payment**
- **Photo(s)**

**This acquittal form must be completed by Wednesday 1 November 2022** to confirm the works have been undertaken.

- Many schools plan for small follow up (seasonal) works (such as grass cutting or further gutter clearance in the January holidays) that need to be done during the summer months (after the acquittal). Since you will be unable to provide invoicing prior to such summer works, the VSBA will accept quotes as evidence to enable acquittal to be completed in one step.

#### Receipt of (second payment) funding

- In instances where the total cost of the vegetation clearance works exceeds your 80 per cent upfront allocation, the VSBA will allocate the remaining allocated amount required upon receipt of acquittal documentation.
- If works do not exceed 80 per cent of the notional fund, the acquittal process is still required.
- If you are considering undertaking major one-off works such as arborist works (costing between \$10,000 and \$30,000) that will result in an 'overspend', you may be entitled to one-off (contingency) funds above your nominal 2022-23 allocation. If you have such plans, you are invited to contact the VSBA as soon as possible at [bushfire@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfire@education.vic.gov.au), to discuss and request access to one-off (contingency) funds.

#### SmartyGrants system

SmartyGrants is a simple online grants program acquittals system. *You will shortly be provided a link to logon to the SmartyGrants system and complete an acquittal form.* Please use your school's (@education) email address as the username and the same password that your school has used previously or go through the simple 'forgot password' process on smartygrants (or contact the VSBA if you are yet to be registered). Once you are logged in, please:

1. Access the 2022-23 Bushfire Preparedness Program online acquittal form (under 'My Submission') and provide the requested information relating to the works undertaken.
2. Submit the requested supporting documentation e.g.: itemised quote for the works.
3. Acknowledge terms of use for bushfire vegetation clearance funding.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

#### ***I don't understand. Who can I contact to help?***

- If you are in any doubt about the program, process or works that you should be undertaking, then please don't hesitate to contact the Bushfire Preparedness (vegetation) Program team at: [bushfire@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfire@education.vic.gov.au) before undertaking any works.

#### ***Is there a new requirement to demonstrate we have a Vegetation Management Plan?***

- Yes, but it is easy. Many schools have a 3 year VMP in place, as a VMP was provided through our free visits over the past two years under the BPVP's School Support Program. All remaining schools will be visited in Aug-Oct 2022 and a VMP provided, so you simply attach that VMP when you acquit. If you already source your own formal advice, a VMP or equivalent, then you can provide that as planning evidence and you can decline the SSP visit(s).
- The specific vegetation clearance tasks that schools required to undertake are outlined above in the section entitled "Bushfire Preparedness (vegetation) Program - Guidelines".

#### ***What exactly can I spend it on and not spend it on?***

- The funding is to be spent on vegetation clearance activities that relate to de-risking your school ahead of the bushfire season.
- The specific vegetation clearance tasks that schools required to undertake are outlined above in the section entitled "Bushfire Preparedness (vegetation) Program - Guidelines".
- Examples of vegetation clearance works that schools may undertake include trimming of trees, removal of trees, cleaning of gutters, fixing external fittings, clearing paths and other activities commonly outlined in this factsheet.
- The funding should not be spent on internal improvements or teaching resources.

- Replanting and fencing may be appropriate if they are performed for the purpose of reducing the risk posed to a school in the event of a bushfire. For example, replanting vegetation away from flammable structure may be a suitable use of allocated funding. Replanting should prioritise indigenous flora with low flammability.

**What about small follow up 'seasonal' works that need to be done after the November acquittal, for example further grass cutting, further gutter clearance in the January holidays?**

- It is expected that most works be completed by November 2022. For small follow up (seasonal) works such as grass cutting or further gutter clearance that are needed during the summer months (after the acquittal), schools are asked to include relevant quotes for those follow-up works, in your November acquittal and these will be accepted as evidence. This should enable acquittal to be completed in one step and the second payment released as early as possible in the new year.

**What are some examples of what I cannot use this funding for?**

- Within this context, a shade cloth would not be an appropriate use of this funding because it will not reduce the risk posed to a school by bushfires.

**Is this funding available to pay for vegetation clearance works completed but not paid?**

- Yes, if you have already undertaken works for the 2022-23 bushfire season, the acquittal process should be used to confirm this and then the payment can be made.
- Please note, you will need to provide supporting evidence as proof of completed works. These should be submitted in SmartyGrants as part of your acquittal process.

**Do I need to provide quotes and if so, how many?**

- Yes, you are required to submit at least one quote for required vegetation clearance works
- If you are in any doubt about the program, process or works that you should be undertaking, then please don't hesitate to contact the Bushfire Preparedness (vegetation) Program team at: [bushfire@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfire@education.vic.gov.au) before undertaking any works.
- Schools are reminded to be compliant with Government procurement procedures as stipulated in the Procurement of Low-value Construction Works Policy. This includes at least one quote for works under \$50,000, although the VSBA always recommends seeking multiple quotes (where possible) to ensure value for money.
- When providing quotes as part of the acquittal process, schools will attest that any conflicts of interest held in relation to the providers have been recorded on Edupay as per the Departments policy.

**If I cut down certain vegetation does it then leave the school open to safety issues?**

- When considering removal of trees from a school site, please always consider things like adequate shade and whether a tree is of significance to the local community or ecosystem.
- Additionally, please consult the guide. For relevant information on ways to appropriately manage vegetation around buildings:

**Who do I contact to get my school site assessed and costed for the specified works?**

- You may be required to perform some, or all, of the specified vegetation clearance works depending on the state and physical characteristics of your school site.
- This may require procuring services from a list of different trades including arborists, gutter cleaners and landscapers.

**Will I need to provide evidence of completion of vegetation clearance works?**

- Yes, you will be required to submit supporting evidence e.g. tax invoice, receipt and photographs. These will need to be submitted in SmartyGrants following the completion of the vegetation clearance works.

### **Can I resubmit the response if I enter incorrect information during my initial attempt?**

- Yes, you may resubmit your response if incorrect information during your initial attempt. It is important that you contact the VSBA to inform them that you will be resubmitting your form, in order for the VSBA to reopen the form for you to do so. Please contact [bushfire@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfire@education.vic.gov.au)

### **How long does my school have to spend the money allocated for bushfire vegetation clearance?**

- BPVP 2022-23 funding is to be spent before the 2022-23 bushfire season commences (notwithstanding the point above about additional seasonal works during the season).

### **What COVID-19 restrictions or considerations may impact on the works and or acquittals?**

- Bushfire preparedness is considered *critical maintenance and safety work to public infrastructure*.
- Schools should regularly refer to the relevant Victorian Government requirements regarding COVID-19 including expectations of contractors.

### **What can I do with any surplus funds that remain after I have completed the specified vegetation clearance works?**

- After completing all the bushfire vegetation clearance activities required for your school (see "Bushfire Preparedness – Guidelines" section), you may use any residual BPVP 2022-23 funds to undertake related bushfire preparedness works and or purchases.
- Please note that you will be required to provide proof of payment for any additional bushfire preparedness activities that you may undertake. Proof of payment documentation should be submitted as part of the acquittal process.

### **Further information**

For further information and inquiries, contact the Bushfire Preparedness (Vegetation) Program team: [bushfire@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfire@education.vic.gov.au) or call 7022 2368 or your regional Operations and Emergency Management representative:

<b>Region</b>	<b>Contact name</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
South-Western Victoria	Andrea Cox	03 4434 0509 / 0407 861 841
South-Eastern Victoria	David Johnson	03 7022 1029 / 0477 796 030
North-Western Victoria	Allison Hughes	03 4433 7547 / 0436 819 074
North-Eastern Victoria	Cristina Perra	03 7505 3641 / 0448 284 749