



HOTSPOTS FIRE PROJECT



CASE STUDY

Community engagement for resilient landscapes & resilient communities

The Hotspots program achieves some of its best and longest lasting outcomes when local RFS volunteer brigades are involved by supporting the Hotspots Project team in workshop delivery and providing follow-up activities for the community.

Landholders in the Southern Tablelands township of Burra, 30 kilometres south of Queanbeyan have shown a keen interest in a series of workshops delivered by the Hotspots Fire Project team, developing plans to reduce bush fire risk on their properties whilst considering locally important environmental issues such as the local koala populations.

Hotspots workshops provide an opportunity for landholders to learn about the ecology and fire management for their area from specially trained officers from the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and ecologists from the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC). The Hotspots team then support landholders to develop bush fire protection strategies specific to their properties whilst considering how their fire management planning may influence native plants and animals in their area.

The program has evolved over time with delivery strategies and content being adapted according to the particular strengths, needs and interests of each community. Hotspots is particularly successful when local RFS brigades have capacity to be involved beyond the workshop delivery and provide follow-up activities to further strengthen community resilience.

The workshops held in Burra provide an excellent example of the success of this approach. The local RFS volunteer brigade Captain Sharon Field has been working to strengthen connections between the community and her brigade to support improved preparedness across the whole community. The Hotspots workshops were a valuable opportunity to build on these efforts. Brigade members, with prior training from Hotspots Facilitator Phil Paterson, were actively involved in the delivery of the workshop program.

During the workshops participants receive support to develop property fire management plans and have an opportunity to participate in demonstration burns. At Burra the burns also provided an opportunity for landholders to work shoulder to shoulder with local brigade members to prepare the burn sites by creating control lines and protecting significant trees.

“We have vegetation just like this, so it’s reassuring to see what the fire might do if we burn at our place.”

Burra workshop participant

The Hotspots demonstration burns are practical examples of how to plan and conduct a safe, prescribed burn on private property. Burra participants closely observed the key steps in conducting a safe burn, were guided in principles for determining suitable conditions for burning and had many of their concerns addressed through informal discussions with brigade members.

Those involved are keen to take part in further demonstration burns which will allow them to observe and compare fire behaviour in different vegetation types. The relatively small scale of these burns also provides opportunities for experienced brigade members to mentor and train newer members.

There was also a positive response to the increased involvement of the local brigade from the community. Workshop participant feedback highlighted the key role the brigade Captain Sharon has played.

“It’s great to have a local brigade Captain who is very genuine, forward thinking and a good communicator.” Burra workshop participant

Strong connections supporting community resilience

These stronger connections between brigade members and landholders have helped to strengthen fire management planning at a landscape level and deepen people’s understanding of, and appreciation for, the work the brigades do in supporting community safety. Phil Paterson is inspired by the vision the brigade has created for the future as they look to create a network of local “Hotspots Hotshots”, developing a skilled team of ‘go to’ people with expertise in different areas.

Through the collaborative efforts of the Hotspots team and local RFS brigades community resilience is increasing. Landholders are better prepared for bush fires and for undertaking burns to improve the natural assets of their properties. Participants are also forming realistic expectations of the capacities of the local brigades and engaging with local planning activities that can have an impact on the overall preparedness and capacity at a community level.

The willingness and ability of the local brigade to provide this increased involvement in the Hotspots workshops has also led to improved follow-on engagement with the local community. Workshop follow up has already begun with the brigade hosting a number of “Hotspots Café” events where workshop participants and other community members were supported in developing their Bush Fire Survival Plans and reviewing existing plans. Participants also shared their experiences of hazard reduction and the post-burn photos they had taken. The most recent Café event was attended by over 40 local residents working together to increase community resilience.

As a result of this Hotspots series and the continuing momentum surrounding it, this community is increasing its involvement in hazard reduction planning. Some members of the community are now keen to develop localised Fire Management Plans for their individual streets. This community level planning can then feed into district level planning demonstrating a ‘bottom-up’ level approach to mitigating risk.

This adapted model of Hotspots delivery is being trialled with other communities and brigades in the surrounding areas and is showing very positive signs of success.

“We now have the situation where individuals understand risk as well as biodiversity issues and can now contribute to community level fire management planning.” Phil Paterson (Hotspots Facilitator)



Image 1 & 2: Burra workshop participants discussing fire and vegetation at a demonstration burn.

“We gained a new recruit and met a family which has just moved into the valley who decided to come along to meet people. It was a great morning and successful. A number of people indicated that they would come back next month with revised or completed Bush Survival Plans for us to check.”

Sharon Field (Burra RFS Brigade Captain)

The Hotspots Fire Project is jointly managed by the NSW Rural Fire Service and the Nature Conservation Council of NSW

Contact us for further information

Nature Conservation Council of NSW

info@hotspotsfireproject.org.au, (02) 9516 0359

NSW Rural Fire Service

hotspots@rfs.nsw.gov.au, (02) 8741 5555

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the project delivery team:

Phil Paterson (NSW RFS) and Kevin Taylor (NCC) for organising and facilitating the Hotspots workshops. Sharon Field (NSW RFS) for her presentation at the Burra workshop and the local Burra RFS brigade for support during the workshops and burns

Research and text: Michelle Rose and Kate McShea

Images: Michelle Rose

And to our project partners



Nature Conservation Council
The voice for nature in NSW



Local Land Services



Office of Environment & Heritage
NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service

