INTERIM FIRE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR FOREST PLANTATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

Forest plantations present particular issues for fire management because of their relative fire sensitivity, their structure and high value.

The structure of plantations often provides continuous fuels for fire to move across the plantation and up into the crown. The key to fire prevention and suppression is to break this fuel continuity. However, the costs of pre-suppression works need to be weighed against the potential fire risk.

The following guidelines for plantation fire management works are considered to be the minimum protection required.

2. PLANNING THE LOCATION OF PLANTATIONS

During various stages of the life of a plantation, fuels accumulate to levels that pose a fire hazard. In these circumstances and particularly during severe fire weather, fires will be very difficult to contain within a plantation area and intense spotting activity can be anticipated.

This threat to life and property must be recognised and planning controls implemented to avoid or modify plantation development in populated areas where the potential for wildfires may be high.

2.1 Prior to establishment

Any decision to establish plantations must consider fire management factors such as:

- the proximity to local development;
- the type and fire frequency of local vegetation;
- the maximum area of contiguous plantation, commensurate with fire protection capability (undivided areas should not exceed 100 hectares);
- the ability to provide access for fire control;
- the topography, slope and aspect as they relate to fire control;
- the sequence of establishment so that plantations more than four years old are not threatened by slash or windrow burning on adjoining areas, adversely positioned relative to the prevailing fire weather direction.
- the need for prescribed burning of adjacent land where it is ecologically appropriate and
- the provision of water points.

2.2 Establishment near habitable buildings

The edge of plantings for any new plantation should not be established within 50 metres of any existing habitable building (ie, a building used as a dwelling or workplace). Where it is appropriate for the species, adjacent plantations should be high-pruned for a width of 50 metres in from the edge, with any elevated fuel reduced for the same width.

Where habitable buildings are already located adjacent to existing plantation, the recommended pruning and /or fuel reduction should be applied. If this is not possible, the fuel management zones contained in the *Guidelines for Development in Bushfire Prone Areas in Tasmania 1999* may be implemented as far as possible to reduce the existing fire risk.

3. FIRE PROTECTION

3.1 Firebreak standards

An assessment of potential fire behaviour, taking account of the fuels and topography adjacent to a plantation should be applied to determine firebreak needs.

As a guide, firebreaks between plantations and vegetation of high to moderate fire frequency should be at least 6 metres wide.

Otherwise firebreaks should be constructed to a width which will:

- meet firefighter safety requirements; and
- satisfy fire suppression objectives.

3.2 Firebreaks as access

Where practicable, firebreaks should be constructed to provide access for four wheel drive vehicles.

3.3 Maintenance of firebreaks

Firebreaks must be kept free of flammable material.

3.4 Fuel reduction standards

Where plantation adjoins vegetation with a high to moderate fire frequency, strategic fuel reduction burning should occur for a minimum of 500 metres from the plantation or to the extent of the flammable vegetation boundary, whichever is closer.

Where planted forest and adjoining vegetation have separate owners the cooperation of the adjoining landowner should be engaged to implement mutually beneficial fire protection measures.

Fuel Reduction Burning should be carried out by competent persons, conforming to the current industry standards of prescription and practice.

3.5 Roads and tracks

A road and track network is required to provide access by ground fire fighting forces and must be maintained for fire protection purposes. In general, a 4 metre wide track, constructed to meet the specifications of the Forest Practices Code Road Class 4 is acceptable.

Specific Requirements:

- fire protection access which connects to perimeter firebreaks should be constructed at the time of plantation establishment;
- access should be of a suitable surface condition and width to allow the safe movement of fire fighting vehicles;
- suitable passing bays and turnarounds should be formed and maintained at intervals not greater than 200 metres;
- dead-end access should be avoided if possible. Where this is not practicable a turning circle, or a bay must be provided;
- all access must be kept in a negotiable state. Encroaching vegetation must be cut back and overhanging branches cleared to a minimum height of four metres from the road or track surface;
- roads and tracks should be signposted to indicate road or track identification, or alternatively, be indicated on maps which are regularly updated.

3.6 Firefighting water supplies

Water supply points must be located and /or constructed at strategic sites to enable quick and safe access for firefighting vehicles and pumps.

Specific Requirements:

- water points should be established such that the distance between any two is no greater than 5 kilometres;
- water points established in association with a helipad for helicopter bucket or water bombing operations should have an installed minimum capacity of 200,000 litres;
- wherever practicable, permanent helipads should be developed alongside major water supply points;
- pump access must be no more than 3 metres above or 2 metres away from the water and be in an area large enough for fire fighting vehicles to manoeuvre;
- all water points must be kept maintained and should be sign posted, or alternatively, be indicated on maps which are regularly updated.

4. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Fire Management means all activities associated with the management and use of vegetation fire, including prescribed burning to meet land management objectives.
Fire Frequency means the history of fire in a given area over a period of time as defined by its frequency and the intensity of fires. Vegetation of high to moderate fire frequency includes buttongrass moorland, heathland, dry sclerophyll forest and grassy woodland.

Firebreak means a strip of land where vegetation has been removed to reduce the risk of fire starting or spreading.
Habitable Building means a building of Classes 1-9 of the *Building Code of Australia* used as a dwelling or workplace.
Plantation means a forest stand established by the planting of seedlings or cuttings of trees of either indigenous or exotic species, selected for their wood producing properties and managed intensively for timber.
Prescribed Burning means the controlled application of fire under specified environmental conditions to a predetermined area and at the time, intensity and rate of spread required to attain planned resource management objectives.
Wildfire means any unplanned vegetation fire.

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