SPARKING CONVERSATIONS

igniting action

A GREATER HOBART BUSHFIRE RESILIENCE PROJECT HANDBOOK

SETTING THE SCENE



Setting the scene

Introduction

Greater Hobart is made up of the four local government areas of Clarence (on the eastern shore of the River Derwent), Glenorchy, Hobart and Kingborough (all of which have western shore alignments).

Abutting the western shore LGAs is the Wellington Range with a large natural environment which creates a significant urban/bush interface. Kingborough also has significant tracts of land used for agricultural purposes. Similarly, Clarence has large urban/bush interfaces with the Meehan Range, as well as large areas of land used for agricultural purposes. All four LGAs have urban pockets of bushland varying in size, leaving most residents living close to the natural environment.

Climate

The climate of Hobart and the greater Hobart region is typical of the world's temperate zones, with mild to warm summers and cool winters. It is changeable, with sudden showers interspersed with hours of sunshine and alternate warm and cool days, particularly in spring and autumn.

The maximum average summer temperatures is 21 degrees, while the minimum average is 11 degrees. In winter the maximum average temperature is 11 degrees, whilst the minimum is 4 degrees with occasional frosts. Summer conditions can fluctuate wildly, with highs in excess of 40 degrees being recorded in Hobart and minimums as low as -8 degrees recorded on kunanyi/Mt Wellington.

The average annual rainfall for Hobart is 627mm however there is a steep east-west rainfall gradient from the river to the summit of kunanyi/Mt Wellington, where the average annual rainfall is 1400mm.

Within Hobart, the rainfall is dispersed throughout the year with a variation in the monthly average of approximately 17mm. Extreme rainfall events may occur as a result of easterly weather conditions, sometimes bringing several days of rainfall that can become concentrated by the orographic effect of kunanyi/Mt Wellington. Periods of intense rainfall can produce extreme flood flows in the rivulets.

Thunderstorms occur on average five times a year, mainly in the summer months. Historically, lightning has rarely caused major bushfires in Tasmania as lightning has mostly been associated with substantial rainfall. This trend however, appears to be changing, with lightning being the cause of a number of recent bushfires within the state.

Westerly driven winds can reach speeds of 150km/h in Hobart. During summer, strong winds are often associated with hot and dry north-westerly weather, resulting in very high fire danger conditions.

Climate change

The global climate is changing resulting in impacts felt across the world. A report conducted on the climate change impacts on bushfire weather in southeast Australia by the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, modelled likely changes in bushfire weather due to global warming using both high and low rates of global warming as predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The results for the greater Hobart region broadly projected very little, if any, change in the average of days when the Forest Fire Danger Rating (and a slight increase in the average number of days when the Grassland Fire Danger Index) is 'Very High' or greater over the next 50 years. This calculation was on the basis that projected increases in temperatures will be offset by increases in rainfall and humidity.

One possible effect of climate change that could influence the occurrence rather than the severity of bushfires is the incidence of thunderstorms.

Greater Hobart's bushfire history and risk

The Greater Hobart region is incredibly vulnerable to bushfires. The 1967 Hobart bushfire remains a defining event in Tasmanian history. It moved so fast that many people had very little time to prepare for its catastrophic impacts. On 7th February 1967, 110 separate fire fronts took just five hours to burn through approximately 264,000ha of land in southern Tasmania, including a large part of Hobart. This was a national tragedy that claimed 62 lives in a single day and became known as the Black Tuesday bushfire.

Property loss was extensive, with 1,293 homes and more than 1,700 other buildings destroyed across southern Tasmania. In Hobart, more than 500 houses were lost. The fires destroyed 80 bridges, 4,800 sections of power lines, 1,500 motor vehicles and over 100 other structures. An estimated 62,000 farm animals were also killed. The total damage bill was put at $40 million in 1967 Australian dollar values.

Of the many bushfires burning across southern Tasmania on 7th February 1967, two impacted Hobart. The Collinsvale fire burned across the face of kunanyi/Mt Wellington and through Fern Tree, while the Limekiln Gully fire came in from behind Glenorchy, through Lenah Valley, West Hobart, South Hobart and Mount Nelson.

Due to the combination of highly flammable vegetation and climatic systems which bring adverse fire weather to southeast Tasmania, Hobart and the greater Hobart region sits within one of the most high-risk areas in Australia. Increased residential development, particularly on the urban fringe, means more people than ever now live close to bushfire prone areas. Houses have been built on the edge of steep bushland valleys and ridges at places like Tolmans Hill, Mount Nelson, West Hobart and on the edges and in the foothills of kunanyi/Mt Wellington. Most of these areas were developed at a time when there were few, if any, planning laws requiring houses be built to standards that improve the ability of the building to withstand a bushfire.

The bushland in and around Hobart is extremely important to the health and identity of the city and the people who live here. We are intimately connected with nature and wilderness. Whether it is a quiet afternoon spent in one of our many parks, riding or walking to work along the Hobart Rivulet, or a day spent walking on kunanyi/Mt Wellington, these are among our best and most cherished times.

There are costs and increased risks in building our homes so close to bushland. If we are to live so close to nature, we must manage the bushfire risk to minimise the threat as well as accept it will not always be possible to save all houses.

A recent survey *'The Social and Biophysical Effects of Alternative Strategies to Reduce Bushfire Danger in Hobart'* (UTAS 2021) conducted by Dr Chloe Lucas from the University of Tasmania in partnership with the City of Hobart sought to gauge the community's attitudes towards bushfire preparation. Surveying more than 400 people living on the urban fringe of Hobart in areas most exposed to bushfire risk, showed that more than 80 per cent of people expected to experience a serious bushfire in their lifetime. Almost half said the thought of bushfire caused them stress.

The survey also found that the majority of residents in bushfire prone areas are convinced of the benefits of good bushfire preparation, but almost half say they need more help. These research findings show we still have a huge amount of work to do in preparing our communities for increasingly dangerous bushfire seasons. Furthermore, there is substantial research showing that peer to peer networks are effective in creating prepared, self-supporting and resilient communities. Through grassroots engagement, communities can be

empowered to understand and recognise the joint responsibility that individuals, communities, governments and support services all play in preventing, preparing, responding and recovering to the threat of bushfires in the greater Hobart area.

The *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project has provided the ability to test and trial alternative approaches to delivering bushfire awareness and preparedness responses, by connecting and engaging deeply within bushfire-prone neighbourhoods within the greater Hobart region. The project has been a two-year funded project, made possible thanks to the Australian Government's National Emergency Management Agency - Preparing Australian Communities Grants Program, in partnership with our Council partners - Glenorchy, Kingborough, Clarence and Hobart, and with support from the University of Tasmania.

PROJECT OVERVIEW



Project overview

Background

Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action - Greater Hobart Resilience Program has been a two-and-a-half-year pilot project across the four greater Hobart local government areas that worked closely with individual neighbourhoods to help them become better prepared for bushfire and more aware of the serious threats bushfire poses to our lives, communities, and the natural world around us.

The project was a joint initiative of the City of Hobart, Kingborough Council, Clarence City Council and Glenorchy City Council. The project aimed to initiate individuals to spark up conversations with friends, family and neighbours helping to ensure communities are safer and better prepared for the threat of bushfire to greater Hobart.

The project was strongly supported by the University of Tasmania and built on recent work conducted by Dr Chloe Lucas, Professor David Bowman and Dr James Furlaud in conjunction with the City of Hobart - '*The Social and Biophysical Effects of Alternative Strategies to Reduce Bushfire Danger in Hobart*' (2021) that evaluated bushfire preparedness communication, as well as research this same group have been undertaking aimed at developing a pathway for reducing the peri-urban backyard bushfire hazard in Hobart.

One finding of this research was that a majority of the residents in bushfire prone areas are convinced of the benefits of good bushfire preparation, but almost half say they need more help. Residents are acutely aware that bushfire is a collective risk, and that working together with neighbours to mitigate this risk is vital. There is considerable appetite for community-led bushfire groups, but a need for expert facilitation to support community education and decision-making around risk reduction is vital. There is substantial research showing that peer-to-peer networks are effective in creating prepared, self-supporting and resilient communities.

Objectives

The objective of the project was to increase the ability of individuals, organisations or communities to prepare for, withstand and recover from the impacts of bushfire.

Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action applies new research and technology to engage neighbourhoods in greater Hobart's highest bushfire risk areas to improve community bushfire awareness, risk mitigation and preparedness, strengthening social connections to enhance resilience. The four local government areas and the University of Tasmania partnered to design, develop and test a program that sought to:

- Improve awareness of local bushfire risks and responsibilities
- Establish relationships to support community-led risk mitigation
- Develop peer-to-peer networks to improve neighbourhood planning and preparation
- Engage local businesses and organisations to actively participate in readiness
- Identify training opportunities to enhance community resilience.

The project employed two Community Engagement Officers and two Hazard Abatement Officers for a period of time to work across the four local government areas, in localities identified by each Council as being in high risk of fire, ember and smoke hazards. The project had three key focus areas:

Focus One: Building Resilience

The project's Community Engagement Officers worked with neighbourhood communities to facilitate peer-to-peer networks for bushfire preparedness and resilience. The Officers assisted community-led groups to improve bushfire

awareness, risk mitigation and preparedness, as well as strengthen social connectedness and increase each community's resilience.

Focus Two: Reducing Risk
The project's Hazard Abatement Officers worked with individuals, households, and neighbourhoods, providing advice and connecting them with appropriate services to assist them:

- Prepare household emergency response plans
- Prepare homes and gardens to reduce the individual and neighbourhood bushfire risk.

The Officers provided proactive assistance to households and groups of households rather than the standard law enforcement approach. Research shows that people prefer an advice/facilitation model to a complaint/compliance model of risk abatement. Good relationships with neighbours are seen as important, and fuel on neighbours' property is often perceived as high risk. The Officers worked collaboratively with groups identified in Focus One, and other households to assist in the identification of risk abatement measures.

The Officers selected a property in each of the four local government areas and redesigned and modified the gardens of each so that the vegetation and other features will be less fire prone and prove less of a hazard to each property. Basic challenges were considered to the external features of each property such as installing gutter guard and changing door mats to less flammable alternatives, moving firewood storage if it is close to the building.

Assisted by specialists from UTAS and specialists within each local government, the Officers applied and refined the results of the recent research into practical on-ground hazard abatement options for households in the four local government areas. The intention was for all four Officers to work directly in and with communities of focus throughout each of the four Council areas.

Focus Three: Research and evaluation
Dr Chloe Lucas (UTAS) collaborated with the working group, Community Engagement Officers, Hazard Abatement Officers and community groups to provide evidence-based advice on best practice for community engagement to investigate and evaluate the following aspects of the program:

- Ability to successfully facilitate bushfire risk mitigation and preparedness with existing groups
- Ability to create new neighbourhood groups in diverse communities, and to successfully facilitate bushfire risk mitigation and preparedness with these groups
- Barriers to longevity of neighbourhood bushfire preparedness
- Most effective forms of communication for community-led bushfire risk mitigation and preparedness.

This research enabled the project to be iteratively improved, and to develop strategies for targeting diverse communities with different demographics and landscape risks. Dr Lucas' research will contribute to the publication of a guide for wider rollout of this project across other local government areas.

Outcomes

The critical outcomes of the project were threefold:

- That local groups of households will have stronger connections to communicate and coordinate with each other to plan for and respond to a major incident such as a bushfire, and to identify assistance options for those in their locality who require help.

- That households, particularly those in close proximity to bushland, will take measures to reduce the bushfire risk, especially from ember attack, on their land. This will be encouraged and enabled through stronger local peer-to-peer communication, better relationships with Councils and facilitation by Community Engagement Officers and Hazard Abatement Officers.
- That communities are empowered to work with Councils to plan and prepare for bushfire, including having input into the management of vegetation along evacuation routes, and management of vegetation on Council managed lands in their areas.

An evaluation supported by the University of Tasmania ensured that the project strategies were iteratively improved and provided a template for rolling out community bushfire preparedness in other parts of greater Hobart. This template could potentially be used by all local government areas in Tasmania to improve community participation in bushfire preparedness.

The guidance was intended to provide:

- A suite of strategies to enable households to undertake risk mitigation measures while retaining a sense of character and place for their properties. These strategies may differ depending on the demographic and landscape context of the community. Keeping in mind that bushfire-related events such as ember attacks can impact well beyond the limited geography of the urban/bushland interface, the abatement related knowledge and experience will be valuable in providing longer term guidance in the application of these measures across local government areas.
- A suite of strategies to encourage and engage neighbourhood groups for community-led bushfire preparedness to form, thrive and be sustained in the longer term. Major events such as significant bushfires currently do not affect every locality every year. Each local government area will need to work with the groups formed out of this project to ensure that they are supported and sustained for the longer term beyond the life of the funding.
- A model for dialogue with local-scale constituencies to enable collaborative and co-produced bushfire management on both public and private land.

This report captures the outcomes in terms of value, benefits and effectiveness of the *Sparking Conversations* project, evaluating its unique manner in which it has engaged with its target neighbourhoods to bring about increased understanding and awareness of bushfire risk, bridge closer connections and networks within local communities, and change attitudes and behaviours when it comes to taking action for mitigating bushfire.

BUILDING COMMUNITY ACTION



Our approach to building community action

Research undertaken by the University of Tasmania's Dr Chloe Lucas found that nearly one in five people living near bushland in Hobart plan to remain in their homes even under life-threatening bushfire conditions. Four in five expect to experience a serious bushfire during their lifetime, according to data collected from Hobart residents. The findings are part of new research carried out by the University in partnership with the City of Hobart to gauge the community's attitudes towards bushfire preparation.

Dr Lucas surveyed more than 400 people living on the urban fringe of Hobart in areas most exposed to bushfire risk, including Fern Tree, South Hobart, West Hobart, Lenah Valley and Mount Nelson. Residents also participated in focus groups as part of the study. The research showed that more than 80 per cent of people in Hobart living close to bushland expect to experience a serious bushfire in their lifetime.

For many people residing in the greater Hobart area, the thought of getting their property bushfire-ready can be overwhelming. Others fear the expense or that they might have to radically alter their cherished garden. Through grassroots engagement, the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project team held events that showed people how to prepare for bushfire, empowering people to take action. The project aimed to be a real-life experiment to discover what stops people from preparing their homes for bushfire. It is intended that the results will help to inform Councils and other government agencies about what they can do to help people and communities overcome the obstacles that prevent them from preparing for bushfire.

Officers from the *Sparking Conversations* project worked directly with 12 neighbourhoods across the four local government areas of Clarence, Hobart, Kingborough and Glenorchy that are recognised for their:

- Proximity to vast areas of bushland
- Risk of ember attack and fire threat
- Limited accessibility for entry and/or escape route(s), and
- Other notable vulnerabilities that make these locations at high to extreme risk to fire threats.

Each of our Council partner areas have variable levels of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. When considering disadvantage as well as their indicators of advantage (professional occupations, high income, higher education levels, high rent, large dwellings), we know that the Glenorchy LGA experiences higher levels of disadvantage including a lack of advantage, compared to the other three LGAs. The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) - Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) for the four LGAs are as follows: Glenorchy (911), Clarence (989), Kingborough (1,020) and Hobart (1,062). Three of the four areas have a higher SEIFA score compared with the state average; however, it recognises there are aspects of disadvantage across all areas of greater Hobart (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025)

Figure 1 in the Appendices outlines the bushfire risk and community profile for each of the twelve target areas of interest. This is particularly important to understand as the capacity and capability for individual communities and neighbourhoods significantly varies, along with their ability to respond and recover from natural disasters and other events. Their educational attainment, employment circumstances, health status, housing situation, and ethnicity and language spoken at home all have a bearing on people's ability to associate with the risk of bushfire and engage with the intentions of a project like *Sparking Conversations*. For these reasons, each area required a dynamic range of tools, communication and engagement techniques to reach and connect with them in a manner that met their needs, giving the opportunity to be heard, and respecting their financial, social and personal circumstances.

The project also recognised that what works for people living in a semi-rural landscape like Leslie Vale may well be different for those living in urban fringe areas like South Hobart or Mount Rumney, and preparing a property changes as you move closer to urban areas such as Claremont or Risdon Vale. Engagement with each of these target neighbourhoods resulted in the creation of bushfire risk demonstration sites, local events and forums, the provision of information to help build understanding around bushfire risk, and what it means to leave early, as well as helping people to develop their emergency plans including identifying priorities and other considerations.

Encouraging participation in the *Sparking Conversations* project has involved a range of activities and communication techniques to successfully engage across all target neighbourhoods.

Community meetings and events

Initial inception meetings, street meets, markets and fairs, and local forums were common engagement activities throughout the *Sparking Conversations* project. These were effective ways of encouraging participation, connecting with local residents and businesses, bolstering networks and relationships within local neighbourhoods, as well as effectively sharing information and raising awareness about the project and bushfire planning, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR).

Newsletters

Regular and consistent information was communicated across the target neighbourhoods via an electronic newsletter. Each edition would feature upcoming event information, updates about the project's activities and opportunities - including expressions of interest for undertaking individual risk and readiness assessments, demonstration property upgrades, tips for bushfire preparedness, sharing local stories of individuals and other key information that may be relevant.

Website and social media

The most effective way of sharing and distributing information relating to the project, was through the use of the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* website and associated social media channels via Facebook and Instagram. These platforms were regularly used and referred to throughout the project.



PROJECT OUTPUTS

Demonstration Properties



Demonstration Properties

A key outcome of the *Sparking Conversations* project involved identifying one building or property in each of the project's local government areas (Hobart, Kingborough, Glenorchy and Clarence) that may be modified to improve the property's bushfire resilience. The purpose of establishing demonstration properties was to enable the public to see ways they could upgrade, retrofit, or landscape their homes and gardens to provide greater protection against bushfire.

Project Officers identified Council and state-owned assets in each of the four local government areas and assessed them based on the following:

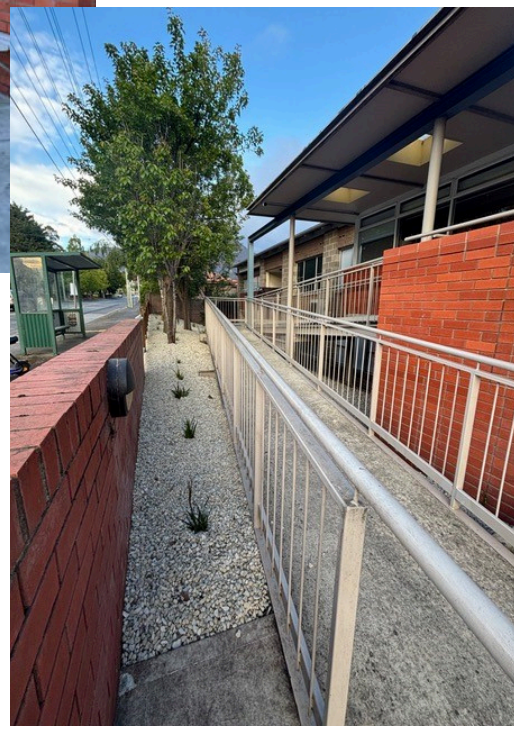
- The level of opportunity for improvements ($20,000 max/property)
- Public accessibility
- Proximity to a bushfire prone area
- Value held by the community or occupier

Identifying all publicly owned assets across the four local government areas allowed the project to consider a wide array of properties that could be transformed into bushfire resilient demonstration properties. By visiting the potential properties in person and using consistent criteria to assess their suitability, Project Officers were able to make informed recommendations about which properties would be most appropriate.

The final selection of properties (refer to **Figure 2** in the Appendices) was endorsed by the project's Steering Committee, ahead of contractors being engaged to undertake the necessary works. Local contractors were engaged supporting local businesses in each area where possible. All works were carried out and completed from October - November 2024.



'Benjamin Court' - BEFORE



'Benjamin Court' - AFTER


PROJECT
OUTPUTS
Fire Adapted
Gardens

Fire adapted gardens

In collaboration with the University of Tasmania (UTAS), researchers from the University's Fire Centre have been investigating ways to support homeowners living in areas of high bushfire risk to make their homes more resilient.

Plant flammability is a key parameter affecting fuel characteristics. It is used in fire risk assessments to model fire behaviour and plan fire management in both natural habitats and urban settings. Yet, the flammability of live plants is still poorly understood, and as a result it is difficult to accurately assess it in gardens. Although new techniques are now available to quantify plant flammability, in Tasmania the current flammability rating is still incomplete and based on limited scientific evidence.

The Fire Centre is a bushfire research hub based at the University of Tasmania that brings together researchers, fire practitioners, land management agencies, communities and individual landowners, providing research platforms and resources to problem solve and empower our coexistence with bushfire.

In collaboration with the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project and through its exclusive access to the fire laboratory (pyrotron) at UTAS, researchers applied state-of-the-art techniques to provide a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the flammability of common native and introduced plants in greater Hobart, with the aim to update current fuel hazard assessment methods for gardens and for southern Tasmanian bushland.

Each plant sample was tested and analysed under controlled conditions at the University's fire lab (pyrotron) and was measured by:

- How easily the plant burnt
- How hot the plant burnt
- How long the plant burnt
- How much of the plant burnt

These four measures were then combined to determine the overall flammability of each plant.

As research at the Fire Centre progresses, further species will be added to provide more low flammable options.

The information collected through this exercise has been published to create an informative brochure to guide peoples' choices and considerations when designing and planting their garden, particularly for those in high fire prone areas. The guide provides a list of commonly found trees, herbs, shrubs and succulents from the samples collected throughout greater Hobart, and rates them against a score range of 1 being low flammability to 4 being very high flammability.

It also provides information and advice on the importance of retaining biodiversity in your garden design. Building resilient ecosystems and opting for low flammable plants can help to achieve balance and harmony when considering how to retain a garden under such circumstances.

The guide also provides useful tips and advice for what to do when preparing the home for a bushfire.




PROJECT
OUTPUTS
Risk & Readiness
Assessments

Risk and Readiness Assessments

Bushfire Risk and Readiness Assessments were offered for residents located in each of the target neighbourhoods to help people understand and know what actions could be taken around their home and property to prepare and be 'bushfire-ready'.

The Project's Hazard Abatement Officers undertook these assessments for free, with each one taking between 1-2 hours depending on the size of the property. They would assess both the structural and non-structural items on and around the property:

- Access and water supply - reviewing access length and hydrant coverage in accordance with the national building code and relevant state-based legislation.
- Risk evaluation - reviewing dominant vegetation type(s) and distance from the house and shed(s)/garage (if applicable). Vegetation was reviewed on a risk basis only. No Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) was provided or discussed.
- Building and construction - reviewing building construction elements and fabric. Assessing bushfire construction in line with the national building code: Standard 3659 - *Construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas (AS3959)*.
- Vegetation and landscaping - reviewing vegetation and landscaping close to the house and outbuildings (if applicable). Assessing the risk presented by the vegetation and landscaping close to buildings in line with Building for Bushfire - Hazard Management Area, Tasmanian Fire Service to reduce bushfire-prone vegetation threat.

Through each discussion, Project Officers also spoke generally about bushfire preparedness, including referencing the Tasmanian Fire Service Bushfire Survival Plan, the importance of having an emergency plan and what to pack, sharing knowledge about the Fire Danger Rating System, where to go to for emergency information and alerts, and the latest information and advice.

The assessments were customised for each individual property, providing a personalised checklist and review that the property owner could then progress and action. Over the life of the project, over 250 individual property Risk and Readiness Assessments were conducted over a rolling basis.

Surveys were conducted immediately after and 6-months following each assessment to evaluate:

- Whether households were more prepared for bushfire as a result of having an assessment
- What sort of physical measures households were willing to take to prepare their properties
- Whether households created a bushfire survival plan as a result of having an assessment.

Staffing changes part way through the project saw a necessary change to the delivery of these assessments. Instead of utilising in-house resources through the Hazard Abatement Officer roles, an independent consultant was engaged to conduct these assessments on behalf of the project. A successful procurement process resulted in the appointment of HED Consulting based in Hobart, who with the assistance of project staff, carried out additional assessments over the 2024-25 summer period.


PROJECT
OUTPUTS
Roadside Verge
Clearing

Roadside Vegetation Clearing

Verge clearing was another key milestone of the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project. The objective of verge clearing operations was to promote safer egress routes in areas effected by bushfire events by removal of selected vegetation.

The grant stated '*escape route (road) verge management - arborists engaged to identify potentially dangerous trees and work with each local government area (LGA) to remove these trees. Stakeholders to identify work required along each major escape route'*. It is important to note however, that undertaking work along 'each major escape route' in each LGA was not possible. Thus, egress routes in each Council area were identified and prioritised to have works undertaken. Where funding permitted, more than one area of verge management was completed in each LGA area.

The budget allocated for works in each LGA was $65,000, which was to cover the cost of all vegetation clearing and associated works, such as professional reports.

The baseline criteria ensured that the areas selected were:

- Within an area listed as being High Risk Human Settlement Area under the relevant Bushfire Risk Management Plan (BRMP) and associated overlay on LISTmap - https://maps.thelist.tas.gov.au/listmap/app/list/map?bookmarkId=605824
- Identified as a high-risk area by Geoneon programming (for all areas other than Clarence City Council) or Roadside Verge Assessment Project (for Kingborough Council)
- Tenure - Council land
- Directly alongside roads that will likely be used as an escape route in a bushfire
- Community feedback from resident engagement
- Previously identified for clearing by Council

After passing an initial desktop assessment, Project Officers conducted ground proofing inspections of the selected areas to further evaluate their suitability, ultimately resulting in areas being identified for works.

Several selection criteria were used for undertaking the onsite inspections, including:

- High fuel loads
- Suitability for clearing, pruning (eg. not too steep or inaccessible for such works)
- No obstructions or dangers that can't be managed with Safe Working Procedures (SWP) (eg. powerlines, traffic etc)
- Visibility for community members
- Benefit to the local community

External experts were engaged to further validate the selected locations. Such reviews included undertaking pre and post Fuel Load Assessments and Natural Values Assessments to ascertain a baseline position for each selected egress route. Contractors were engaged to undertake the works required within the allocated budget. On completion of the works, a second assessment was conducted to verify that the works have been able to reduce fuel load and reduce risk from trees in these key areas.

Feedback to partnering Councils included:

- before and after photographs and video footage (where possible)
- before and after consultant reports
- tonnage of vegetation removed

Figure 3 in the Appendices shows what areas were selected and what works were conducted along each egress routes for the three local government areas.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

Community Resilience Building



Community Resilience Building

Community members are the first responders during an emergency, and take actions to save and protect themselves, their families and their communities. Disaster-affected people, households, and communities understand their needs better than any of the professional, government, non-government or corporate supporters. They have the right to make their own choices about their own recovery. It is well recognised that the processes used by government and other key recovery agencies to interact with and support communities are critical and can impact either positively or negatively on the capacity of individuals and groups to manage their own recovery processes.

A key component to building resilience within communities is to develop capacity for individuals, groups and organisations so they can respond strongly should a fire or disaster event occur within their neighbourhoods. Individuals and communities have inherent strengths, assets and resources, which should be actively engaged within the emergency and recovery phase. Because trauma emanates from profound powerlessness, interventions should emphasise empowerment, meaning they need to emphasise strengths, mobilise the community's capabilities, and help the community to become self-sufficient.

It is a recognised fact, that stronger communities will respond better to disaster. Building awareness and sharing vital knowledge with communities and community champions helps them as they seek to understand the strengths, needs and opportunities of their people and place, including in disaster resilience contexts. It helps people recognise the interconnections between the social, cultural, economic, wellbeing, infrastructural and environmental domains of life, and develop ideas that enhance community resilience holistically.

The term 'community-led' emphasises a community-driven approach that strives to achieve strong community participation and leadership in all levels of planning, implementation and evaluation of recovery processes. Community-led social recovery processes fundamentally aims to support self-help and strengthen the resources, capacity and resilience already present within individuals and communities.

For this very reason, a key outcome of this project has focused and emphasised on the importance of facilitating and empowering local communities to determine their own needs and shape their recovery programs and activities. Working initially with individuals, increasing their awareness and understanding of bushfire, risks and actions enables them to manage and take responsibility for themselves, which inadvertently leads to a willingness to share and connect more broadly among neighbours. In some areas, this expanded beyond neighbour connections, to a broader community level whereby communication channels and formalised groups have emerged such as the Mt Nelson Progress Association.

Conversations held through forums and events shifted to discuss the unique differences among our target neighbourhoods - highlighting the way in which they differed in terms of their socioeconomic status, their degree of geographic isolation or their vulnerability, and identifying ways in which neighbourhoods could strengthen and broaden their connections with everyone in their local area.

Dedicated training delivered in conjunction with Australian Red Cross, The Resilience Canopy and The Happy Chondriac Society helped to prepare individuals, community members and leaders, and emergency response teams from across our four LGAs, for how to ensure individual and community wellbeing in response to trauma and adversity.

Additional resources have also been developed to provide ongoing support for individuals, groups and organisations through the creation of a Community Support Toolkit. The Toolkit has been designed to act as an ongoing resource

and reference tool providing key information and connections that communities in high bushfire prone areas can refer back to regularly. It links to a variety of known and trusted sources of information so this vital work can be continued and communities are empowered to undertake and formalise their own local connections and relationships.

As an ongoing legacy for the project, the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* website (www.sparkingconversations.com.au) has been updated to reflect the outcomes of the project, including a comprehensive digital library of resources for ongoing sharing and access by community, local government partners, and other agencies and stakeholders. The City of Hobart have committed to retaining the website's domain hosting to ensure the resource lives on beyond the project's conclusion. It links and refers back to each of the greater Hobart Council partners for ongoing contact and engagement with regard to bushfire and emergency management activities and initiatives. Council partners have been encouraged to ensure their communications also link back to SCIA to retain the profile within the community, making the transition out of the project more streamlined and efficient.

The website incorporates a digitised version of the Flammability Guide, enabling easy updating and additional listings to be created as more plants are tested by the University of Tasmania's FireLab. It shares case studies and practical stories as examples of how individual residents and groups can adopt similar initiatives to better prevent, prepare, respond and recover from bushfire.

The website also incorporates documents produced through the project, as well as consolidating documents, web links and other resources by other stakeholders including the Tasmania Fire Service. Video content has also been produced, reflecting on a number of parts from the project and other important elements such as health related impacts of bushfire (ie. smoke and mental health).


WHAT WE
LEARNED

What we learned from this project

The following learnings have been derived from the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project.

Engagement

Fire can be a very emotional topic to discuss, and as such the tone and approach needs to be handled in a delicate and empathetic manner. Including a disclaimer is often useful ensuring participants are comfortable talking about fire and engaging in such conversations can help reduce stress, anxiety and manage any triggering situations from underlying traumas. Adopting a friendly, conversational approach is important, particularly when representing local government to ensure that any recommendations or advice given is not perceived as compliance action or authoritative.

The style of events needs to be tailored to each community and their interest, whether they are formal, informal, and incentivised to encourage attendance and active participation. Flexibility in delivery is a key consideration, particularly given some groups related more to pictorial information rather than lecture style delivery. Feedback from some participants indicated an over emphasis in areas that were not deemed necessary or primary purpose/reason for attending. Most were keen to simply hear from TFS representatives or obtain personal advice relating to their circumstances. Where these opportunities were constrained, the value of these events was lost and may have attributed to a disengagement from the program and/or future activities.

The level of engagement varied significantly based on the season and the weather. Taking advantage of high levels of interest during the bushfire season and into autumn to hold events and engage in meaningful conversations with and between neighbours was beneficial.

Door knocking

In recognition of the diversity of the neighbourhoods, their demographics and socioeconomic status, door knocking was used as a means of raising awareness across target neighbourhoods. 1,044 door-to-door conversations took place, resulting in 424 residents signing up to be involved in the program. This method was targeted however in the right areas, had a substantial impact on the project. They were however, extremely time consuming and utilised a copious amount of resource to enact. The effectiveness of this engagement method varied - with some areas engaging more positively, whilst others being hap-hazard. The time of day in which door knocking occurred (weekdays during the day) meant that less than 50% of occupants were actually home, requiring calling cards to be left and follow ups to be made. More variable days/times for conducting these visits could have resulted in a different outcome in some areas.

Forums

Throughout the duration of the project, local forums were convened in all target neighbourhoods with the aim of providing structured information relating to bushfire prevention, preparation, response and recovery to better inform and educate community members.

Over 20 forums were held across the 12 target neighbourhoods, with over 600 people attending. Each area and event was tailored to reflect that community and their specific needs and circumstances. The most appreciated speakers and/or topics based on survey feedback from attendees were:

- Local TFS Fire Brigade Chief or representatives talking about the upcoming bushfire season
- SCIA Project Officer(s) talking about how to prepare for bushfire (self and house)
- Local community member(s) sharing their lived experience of bushfire (particularly in that actual area)

Of the events that worked well, having local TFS Brigade involvement was important, and highly valued by both community and Brigade members. Their presence helped to bridge relationships and connections within the local community and gave the opportunity to encourage people to volunteer with their local Brigade. Where representation from local Council members (either elected or Council Officers) occurred, their presence enabled specific enquiries to be responded to, giving visibility of Council with local residents, helping to establish ongoing relationships between the two which would bode well for the longevity and sustainability of the project. The most successful forums were those that provided opportunities for community members to connect on an informal basis either through the catering provided or just simply allowing connections to occur during the event.

Monitoring RSVPs for each event was difficult; no matter what the event format or arrangement was, getting people to commit prior was hard. This made it difficult to gauge for catering purposes and to track the value of such events. Timing and conflict with other local events and activities was often tricky to navigate, particularly when pitching these activities during the peak bushfire season which coincides with a lot of social activities (ie. Christmas/New Year festivities and other events) occurring.

Street meets

These activities were utilised early on in the project's delivery as a way of connecting on a more grassroots, local level. Under the grant application, they had been intended to be neighbourhood based, however these ended up being delivered in a far more granular way whereby they focused on actual streets/road locations. The gatherings enabled conversations to occur among direct neighbours living within immediate and close proximity to each other - which made for open discussion around the implementation of bushfire plans and what support they may need or could offer to one another.

They also provided the opportunity for considering the formation of WhatsApp groups and communication trees as a way of keeping connected and sharing information and knowledge relating to local bushfire events. While they did generate and lead to the creation of fourteen local WhatsApp groups and bring neighbours together (some of whom for the first time), the approach was resource intensive given their small catchment nature (ie. individual streets or roads). The most successful ones relied on the nomination of a community champion who was willing to host events and convene gatherings.

Facilitation was a challenge in some circumstances, particularly managing strong personalities or differing points of view among the group. Scalability and replicability of this approach would be difficult given the resources required, the diversity of local needs, and the dynamic of individual streets and neighbourhoods.

Communications

Maintaining effective communication across the duration of the project and throughout the various target areas required extensive effort and constant adjustment to ensure it resonated and reached the desired audience. More often messages had to be repeated numerous times to trigger a response or action. The most effective method was simple and practical messaging. Any communications relating to the preparation of bushfire can be nuanced, with one-on-one conversations found to be more effective in ensuring understanding of individual context and what information they may require.

Communication channels such as social media (Facebook and Instagram) had a reasonably small following - this was symptomatic of the slow traction to build up a profile given it was a two-year pilot project, and the general demographics (mainly age profiles) of those engaged through the project. There was very little scope or emphasis to generate awareness and increase the following on these platforms, as the communication methods prioritised more tangible and direct means of engaging with community through face-to-face events and the like.

While multiple forms of communication were used, a more diverse audience could have been reached had a more strategic approach been adopted and more time devoted to better utilising the power of digital marketing alongside traditional forms of engagement. Better understanding of target audiences would have also informed the approach applied maximising the benefits of social media and other digital media channels.

Letter drops were effective for reaching wider audiences; however, it did require a substantial budget and intensive resourcing dedicated to printing materials and filling envelopes. It was however effective in raising general awareness of the project, and for promoting evaluation surveys with all residents across the target areas.

It was vital for the credibility of the project, that any messaging aligned with official channels and information provided by the Tasmanian Fire Service, State Emergency Services and other agencies. In every effort, people were referred back to official sources including TasALERT for ongoing information and advice. Duplication of existing official resources and information did creep into the project.

Target areas

Through the project, the team worked closely with twelve small suburbs across Clarence, Glenorchy, Hobart and Kingborough. The selection of these areas was based on their high bushfire risk and profiles, with the aim of helping people in these areas to better understand their risks and what they can do to better prepare their homes, families and communities for bushfire.

On average these suburbs had population sizes of between 300-400 residents and in some cases, localised around particular streets or specific locations where the bushfire risk was greater. To enable engagement within these areas, the team applied a very granular approach which saw street by street engagement, rather than a larger collaborative approach. While this approach did work to a degree, it was somewhat restrictive in terms of the effectiveness of or the capacity to connect areas together and appropriately demonstrating risks in other areas. For example, in Lenah Valley those residents that were closer to bushland were more engaged and receptive to the advice and information given through SCIA, compared with those that were at the urban, city edge of the suburb. This then led to localised, granular engagement such as street meets requiring more intensive engagement and resourcing. This was consistent across a lot of the target areas.

Working with twelve different neighbourhoods was complex requiring different communications and engagement to ensure the project's success.

Key factors include:

- Lower socio-economic areas were more challenging to engage with and required more time to build relationships. They often mentioned that they had more pressing issues to deal with (such as health or cost of living pressures), leaving very little time or energy to do anything about the threat of a bushfire.
- Free time of community members was also a factor in the level of engagement. Retirees generally had more time and were likely to engage, compared to working families, couples and younger people.

Utilising existing community groups was an important and good way to break into target areas, serving as local advocates for the project. There was notable success in some neighbourhoods such as Bonnet Hill and Mount Nelson which can be attributed to the strength, profile and support of the Bonnet Hill Community Association and Mount Nelson Progress Association to partner with *Sparking Conversations* in the delivery of events and activities. Where there was an identifiable 'hub' or community place to gather and connect, engagement was easier. These locations provided natural places where activity was already occurring, making social connections easier to navigate and the opportunity to leverage events and gatherings within local communities.

It was also obvious that those communities who had been exposed to the risk of bushfires in the past or had a very distinct relationship/proximity to bush areas, were more aware and engaged around the risk of a bushfire impacting on them. Those areas that were more urban and perceived a lower risk or lacked understanding of the level of risk that they were exposed to (such as Austins Ferry and West Moonah), were harder to connect and engage with than other areas. Likewise, those areas where there was a higher proportion of rental properties compared with homeowners, equally made a difference to how engaged or responsive residents were to the program.

Roadside Verge Clearing

The objective of the project's verge clearing operations sought to promote safer egress routes in areas effected by bushfire events by select removal of vegetation. Project management of this activity was managed centrally by the City of Hobart, given its complexity and coverage across multiple Councils. This approach enabled easier scheduling of works across each Council area, and ensured procedures were satisfied including the issuing of works notices and resident engagement activities prior to any works occurring.

Collaboration with each Council was extensive. Engagement took place with relevant personnel from each Council, including infrastructure and works departments, natural resource management and emergency management teams to confirm and prioritise selected road networks based on the project's intentions. The work specification was developed in conjunction with the project's Steering Committee, however it fell short in terms of providing adequate clarity and explanation of the approach.

Procurement proved difficult largely due to budget constraints. An insufficient budget allocation had been made in the initial project planning, underestimating the true cost of undertaking the complexity of works involved. In particular, the tree canopy component was the most undervalued part, leading to all quotes obtained coming in over budget. With this in mind, the decision was made to split the contract into two parts, and reducing the scope of the tree canopy works to ensure this could be completed in part, focusing on higher risk road networks rather than all areas being completed.

The timings and impact of staff resignations and procurement delays had a significant impact on this aspect of the SCIA project. The late commencement of this work meant there were considerable time pressures to ensure its delivery within grant timeframes. This created a lack of flexibility with respect to timing and scheduling, and required alternative methods to be adopted during the works to mitigate against natural values impacts such as bird nesting and migratory timings, flowering and seed drop periods, and other flora and fauna impacts. The split in contract also required extensive collaboration and communication to ensure both parties worked well together, however in some respects it also incurred additional costs for the project where duplication of work was concerned (ie. traffic management costs). These issues could have been worked through more collectively had early engagement occurred and consideration of input by the contractors to maximise efforts and consider aspects not familiar or easily identified by the project team. More effective communication with affected residents could have also been applied too.

The specification lacked clarity with regard to several key aspects, including providing adequate baseline references such as the basis for gauging the desired clearance height and how this was to be used to determine the level of clearance required (for example, if this was measured from the height of the road, bottom of a drain or edge of the gravel verge to determine the desired two metre height clearance). This failed to be identified prior to the procurement process occurring, resulting in unclear work specifications from the beginning. To compensate, adjustments were made during the contracting period and in collaboration with the contractors to determine a practical solution that was agreeable for all parties.

Additionally, the same documentation also failed to adequately clarify the

reference point at which contractors were required to clear to a suitable distance from the roadway - for example, four metres from the edge of the sealed road, or four metres from the edge of the gravel road verge. This was an important point to clarify since in some locations, some roads had a substantial gravel verge, whilst other areas had minimal to none. As the contract was split across two contractors - one conducting the tree canopy works and another undertaking onground clearance, this clarity was necessary to ensure consistent approaches across both parts of the work. In a lot of cases, the contractor applied their own judgement to determine how best to handle on a case-by-case basis. Communication between the two contractors was vital for ensuring both worked to the same standard and benchmarks, and coordinated their associated activities and work schedules where possible.

Another issue with the specification was its ambiguity with respect to the selection of areas to be thinned or removed in such a way that ensured the approach was replicable and consistent across all target areas. It became evident through discussions with contractors and previous team members, that the intent of these works, was to prioritise and focus on areas that had specific levels of density, continuity and distinct connectivity of bushland abutting the road verge, and areas where overhanging trees and vegetation could negatively impact the roadways. Identifying these areas required localised knowledge and expertise and could largely only be determined through pre-works inspections of all areas. Through dialogue with the contractors, a suitable treatment approach was determined and agreed to for each area.

Fuel load and natural values assessments were undertaken by an external contractor prior. Their advice helped to inform Council representatives in their decision making, and confirmation of work sites. With all identified sites within the target areas for Glenorchy indicating low fuel loads through the pre assessment, an informed conversation between project managers and Council representatives was held, leading to the decision not to proceed with any works in that LGA. This enabled the redistribution of available funds to the remaining three LGAs, allowing more extensive works to be conducted in the other areas, including highly valued and regarded tree canopy thinning to be undertaken in those areas. Although works weren't covered by SCIA in Glenorchy, the process did reaffirm the value and benefits of the Council's existing works program and prioritisation of fuel load management in critical areas which are generating positive outcomes for their community in this regard.

Demonstration Properties

The four selected properties provided a diverse mix of venues to showcase and highlight a range of modifications to retrofit and upgrade existing buildings and property. Three of the four are community assets owned by partnering Councils and can therefore be retained under Council property maintenance work. The fourth property however - 'Benjamin Court' in South Hobart, is a social housing complex and is owned under a different entity. It is unknown whether the works conducted at this property will be expanded upon or committed to beyond the initial investment that has been made, therefore, bringing into question its ability to continue as a legacy for the project.

The selection of what modifications were done at each property, was capped against the budget of $20,000 per property. In some cases, the costs of modifications came in either under or over that amount, limiting the extent of what could be done at each property. Furthermore, a full complete building assessment was not undertaken prior, with only recommendations being made that fitted within the budget allocation and nothing more. This constrains the opportunity for further works to be recommended to property owners after the project, enabling them to extend or leverage off the works undertaken.

Viewings of the properties were conducted as part of the final round of forums and events. Residents were encouraged to come and inspect the properties and were guided by project staff who highlighted the changes that had been made. Of the few residents that attended the viewings, they were appreciative of

having the chance to discuss fixtures and receive recommendations for how they might apply similar at their own properties. It is hoped that these sites can continue to be facilitated as places for community to learn and be inspired, and enable the upgrade of other community assets within our communities.

Fire Adapted Gardens

Over 50 residents from across greater Hobart, willingly opened up their gardens and homes to University of Tasmania researchers, who came to collect samples and discuss fire adaptability around their properties. Through the collection, researchers were able to collect over 200 plant specimens for testing in the University of Tasmania's FireLab. Data collected informed the development of a flammability guide depicting commonly found garden plants from across greater Hobart gardens.

Feedback from those who participated has been overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing their satisfaction in being able to contribute to this important work. Many have taken onboard the information and feedback obtained through their involvement making improvements and changes to plant selection in their gardens or simply removing hazards close to buildings. The majority also opted to have a Risk and Readiness Assessments to further inform changes and modifications to their homes.

The University of Tasmania has received overwhelming support and interest in their research thanks to their involvement in the project. The successful launch of the Flammability Guide in January 2025 resulted in an overwhelming response from local media promoting the availability of the guide. Community members have heeded the advice about the importance of plant selection, retaining biodiversity in our gardens, and how we can all be responsible in minimising the flammability of our urban backyards as it relates to bushfire movement and pathways through our suburban areas. A second reprint of the guide was authorised to ensure sufficient stock of the guide remains long after the project, following such an overwhelming response for copies.

An electronic version of the guide was created on the Sparking Conversations website, increasing the guide's usability and ability to be updated easily as more plants continue to be tested by the FireLab. Since the launch of the guide, nationwide press coverage has generated high traffic to the website with over 2,200 page views to the Fire Adapted Gardens page alone. Users have then subsequently referred to individual pages for each plant category. The digital version allows easy updates to happen, which hopefully sees ongoing interest and awareness being shared across the community about the importance of plant selection and how biodiverse gardens can help mitigate against the risk of bushfires. Distribution through local nurseries and garden centres also ensures ongoing use and education around plant flammability across greater Hobart.

Risk and Readiness Assessments

The delivery of the Risk and Readiness Assessments changed over the duration of the project, having initially been delivered by project staff, to later in the project, contracted out to external consultants. The need for the change was purely due to staff resignations, however due to the timing of such departures, the opportunity to recruit replacement staff proved difficult, meaning an alternative approach was needed. The change provided a further chance to test an alternative delivery model - one which may provide a more sustainable succession opportunity given the high receptiveness and value placed on the assessments by participants. The initial process did pose potential risks for Council whereby project staff were providing advice and recommendations associated with minimising risks for home and property owners where building and development regulation and compliance were concerned. The use of project staff to provide advice and recommendations exposed Council to a level of risk and legality that may not necessarily be amenable to all LGAs' risk appetite if it were to be replicated elsewhere. It also brought into question, the potential for conflict should a property owner or developer use the advice provided through a risk and readiness assessment to pursue other development matters through Council. The conflict of interest in that situation could have significant and costly impacts for Council in serving its role as a Planning

Authority and other authoritative roles and functions. The opportunity for an external consultant to undertake the service on Council's behalf however, provided impartiality and independence, whilst retaining a consistent method of delivery. The consistency of delivery was an important factor through the feedback obtained from participants. In the early delivery of the assessments, as the amount of interest grew and more assessments were booked in, the investment of project staff time to prepare for and undertake the assessments had a considerable impact on their time and resource availability to support other facets of the project. A loose process was initially prepared outlining how the assessments would be conducted and topics covered. This was further developed and refined as the project progressed, meaning that the attention to detail and the amount of support or advice provided back to participants also changed over that time too. The earlier assessments appeared to have had a lot more time given to them, which naturally waned over time.

The engagement with a consultant provided a new opportunity to further refine the process that had been initiated by the previous team and embed a consistent delivery method. It gave certainty that follow up communication would be provided to all participants and to a set standard, and allowed greater flexibility in the way in which product recommendations or advice was given. The consultancy had access to other qualified personnel (such as qualified building designers and engineers) which has been particularly useful when faced with more difficult or complex issues. The standard of the service was certainly enhanced giving a more robust output for the project.

Overwhelmingly, the most successful and highly valued output of the project - the Risk and Readiness Assessments provided the opportunity for engaging in one-to-one conversations specific to individuals' needs and circumstances. Over 250 assessments were conducted over the duration of the project scoring an average value rating of 4.8 out of 5 (from 43 responses). The average rating for usefulness of information rated 4.8 out of 5 (from 43 responses). Common areas for improvement were the provision of a list of businesses to assist with undertaking upgrades and modifications, as well as obtaining a list of example products with pictures so residents could follow through on implementing these changes.

Six months after having had a Risk and Readiness Assessment, 95% of participants had reported having made changes to their properties. The most common change noted was the removal of vegetation and flammable items from close to their house and buildings. It's equally important to note that of those who had an assessment conducted, 83% also confirmed they had since progressed and completed a bushfire survival plan. By having a direct conversation with an individual about their particular situation, it prompted an immediate response by participants to take appropriate action. Throughout the project, when asking individuals if they had prepared a bushfire survival plan, the most common responses given would often be rather non-committal, broad and not well considered. In a lot of cases, they had thought about preparing one but had not documented one formally. The one-on-one conversations made people stop and think carefully about what they would do in a range of situations relevant to their home and property. Through the conversations the consultant was able to discuss a range of scenarios, bringing clarity to what real emergency situations may be like, and providing the chance to raise ideas and suggestions for things not considered previously. All of this combined, triggered a sense of urgency and a willingness from participants to commit to working through a 'to do list' triaging actions that were both reasonable and achievable for maximum benefit. It made it clear and easy to follow. The value placed on the consultant's or officers time to come out to one's property and provide exclusive advice, was much higher than just simply attending a meeting or reading information in a booklet or online - leading to people feeling a sense of responsibility to follow through on the advice and recommendations provided. It made the effort far more tangible.

An overwhelming majority of participants indicated a change in approach to how they will respond in the event of a bushfire. Through the assessment

process, the level of awareness and knowledge about the risks and responsibilities relating to bushfire events notably increased. Feedback strongly indicated a dramatic boost in their confidence and knowledge, resulting in them being more informed about the risks and impacts a fire could have, especially if they decide to stay. It brought home realities that had not been practically thought through.

Anecdotally there have been an overwhelmingly high number of participants indicating they have dramatically changed their intentions of what they will do in the event of a bushfire - quoting to have gained better understanding of what could occur and how prepared they actually are. This has been the most significant change and benefit coming out of *Sparking Conversations* - enabling conversations and engagement to occur among neighbours and other friends and families, raising broader awareness and education deep within our communities.

Local neighbourhood groups and communication channels have also emerged as a result of these one-on-one conversations. Fourteen WhatsApp groups have been established in most of our target neighbourhoods - most of which came about as a result of individuals obtaining more knowledge and understanding of their own risks. They recognised the importance of how building stronger connections with their neighbours could help extend their support and response in bushfire situations. There are however, limitations with these groups as they have focused on street level connections in a lot of circumstances. In one such area - Bonnet Hill, multiple street level groups have formed, however have reached a point of needing to determine how best to manage in a collective way, the multitude of groups to ensure consistency of approach, coverage of the neighbourhood, and reducing the burden on a few select community volunteers to manage and maintain them into the future.

While the assessments during the pilot were provided free of charge thanks to the grant, anecdotal feedback received from some participants indicated a willingness to pay for such a service if it meant that this kind of support could continue in some iteration. Given the high regard for the service and the significant impact and benefits gained through this initiative, it would be worthwhile exploring ways that could enable a version of this service to continue.

Staffing

The project's success has relied heavily on establishing trust and relationships between Project Officers and community members. However, with this comes a need for consistency in retaining staff to ensure relationships are managed and nurtured to ensure ongoing engagement and participation. Being a two-year funded project, the project had difficulty in retaining staff for the duration of the project - having experienced several iterations of staff throughout. The project required the fulfilment of five dedicated Officer roles - four of which were funded by the grant, and the fifth (Project Manager) being provided by the City of Hobart as part of their in-kind support. The grant funded roles were contracted, fixed term offering minimal opportunity for succession beyond the life of the project in its entirety. This proved to be a challenge for the acquisition and retention of suitably trained and qualified experts to deliver the project. Ensuring commitment to both the project and individual roles presented challenging team dynamics; resulted in a lack of clarity and understanding of the project's objectives and direction, and a high rotation of team members during the project period. Furthermore, the project struggled in its recruitment of suitably skilled staff to deliver the project in line with its intent, due largely to the design of the roles and their position descriptions. They failed to adequately describe the specialised skills that were being sought - which also meant that the recruitment failed to attract the right candidates in some circumstances.

General feedback from participants indicated that two years was an insufficient amount of time to have any deep penetrating change or influence. However, there have been some very localised success stories - some of which have been captured through the case studies in this report. Participants have

expressed that some neighbourhoods (particularly those that were more highly engaged and aware of their risk), stood to benefit the most by the pilot. They now have a platform upon which to take initiatives further, doing more within their communities and are likely to do so. However, it is clear that awareness of the program and its opportunities was only just starting to build traction as the momentum shifted due to the project's looming conclusion. Staff departures also played a factor as familiar faces were no longer, and relationships and momentum were lost as a result.

Without ongoing funding or tangible commitment beyond the pilot, that same uncertainty was shared with residents bringing about questions and confusion by some of the commitment to the program by project partners, and how serious the matter was being considered. This may have attributed to the reduced engagement experienced in the latter part of the project, and a disregard for its importance and intentions.

Strategic partnerships

Another key indicator of success for the project, was the strength of the relationships held with the four local Councils who co-partnered to deliver the project and key stakeholders such as the Australian Red Cross, University of Tasmania and Tasmanian Fire Service (TFS). Led by the City of Hobart, the grant recognised the collaboration with the four local government areas as being responsible for the delivery of the project. Namely, the areas responsible for emergency management and/or community resilience were identified from each Council area to aid in its oversight and delivery. While in principle, this approach made logical sense given the scope of works to be undertaken and the project's objectives, it did however manifest very differently in reality. Noting that each Council's structure and resourcing level differed, so too was their level of commitment, and capacity and capability to support the project, impacting on the ability to effectively deliver outcomes on the ground in some target areas. The level of engagement and support extended to the project was mixed - especially as staff turnover and structural changes impacted the space.

For those Councils with dedicated key personnel was available to the project, those areas gained greater success and value from the project for their communities. Attendance and staff support at the events and forums, sharing of communications and promotional material, and critical connections, linking and networking within local neighbourhoods were just some of the areas in which greater outcomes were gained through stronger ties with our local Council partners. Recognising that each Council is structured and resourced differently, this aided in the disparity of support, engagement and buy-in from these essential partners. Through the project's design, if the project's Community Resilience Officers had been more integrated into each partnering Council, this could have enabled more direct support through the provision of extra resources to more closely link local communities in preparation for succession for the project.

The same can be said for our strategic partners - the Australian Red Cross, University of Tasmania and Tasmanian Fire Service. Over the project's duration, the level of engagement from each fluctuated due to competing priorities and changing resources and capacities. Commitments were made early on in the project such as to support in the project evaluation and analysis, conducting training, or the provision of information. The setting of expectations of these relationships was not always clearly articulated or documented. As the project's duration spanned 30-months, changes within these organisations meant that in some cases things were unable to be delivered or were actioned partially, requiring changes or alternatives sourced to ensure delivery was possible. Unfortunately, very little could be done to mitigate against these impacts, however ensuring flexibility and suitable alternatives could be sourced when and as needed, did place strain on the project at those times. For the purposes of a pilot, this did enable the project to broaden its reach and collaboration with other services such as Tasmania Police, Bureau of Meteorology, UTAS Menzies Institute for Medical Research, RSPCA, SES, The Happy Chondriac Society, The Resilience Canopy, Bushfire Resilience Inc, Neighbours Every Day and Neighbourhood Connect to name a few.

CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY 1

A HOMEOWNER'S JOURNEY TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Ian Marchant and his family moved to bushfire-prone Bonnet Hill, initially selecting a large block of land, which they later realised required significant maintenance.

Over the years, they experienced several close calls with bushfires, including instances where their doormat and fence caught fire. Ian has spent years adapting their property to mitigate fire risks while maintaining the natural beauty of their surroundings. Originally drawn to the spacious landscape, they soon realised the challenges that came with managing a large property in an area susceptible to wildfires.

Through trial and error, they have implemented a range of fire preparedness measures, from installing fire pumps and irrigation systems to clearing flammable vegetation and reinforcing structures with ember-resistant materials. Their efforts have been informed by expert advice, local community engagement, and past experiences with close calls, including spot fires that threatened their home.

ACTIONS TAKEN

- **Vegetation Management:** The household has strategically removed highly flammable vegetation, including large wattles and conifers, and replaced them with lower-risk plants like azaleas. They also manage grass height to maintain fire safety while preserving biodiversity.
- **Water Storage and Firefighting Infrastructure:** A combination of water sources, including a swimming pool (20,000L), multiple rainwater tanks, and a mobile fire pump, provides a reliable emergency water supply.
- **Sprinkler Systems and Fire Protection:** Plans are underway to install a roof sprinkler system, ensuring the house remains wet in the event of a bushfire.
- **Community Engagement:** Ian has remained active in local bushfire preparedness networks, transitioning from informal phone chains to modern WhatsApp groups for real-time updates and coordination.
- **Structural Adaptations:** Fire-resistant materials, including cement sheeting instead of timber in key areas, have been used to improve the home's durability against ember attacks. Stainless steel flywire has also been installed to prevent embers from entering the home.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

- The realisation that maintaining a larger property requires ongoing effort, particularly in managing vegetation and infrastructure.
- The importance of regularly maintaining fire equipment, as past experience showed plumbing issues led to pump deterioration.
- Recognising that, in extreme fire events, evacuation is the safest option rather than staying to defend the property.

Ian emphasises the importance of attending community bushfire preparedness meetings to learn from others and implement best practices. Their proactive approach demonstrates how a combination of infrastructure improvements, water management and community collaboration can significantly enhance bushfire resilience.

CASE STUDY 2

PIONEERING BUSHFIRE RESILIENCE IN LENAH VALLEY

Rob and Helen Rothwell are long-term residents living in Hobart's bushland fringe neighbourhood of Lenah Valley.

They participated in the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project, which included having a Risk and Readiness Assessment of their property. Through this initiative, they gained a deeper understanding of bushfire risks and strategies to enhance their preparedness.

Their property is located in a high bushfire-prone valley on Brushy Creek Road, an area historically affected by major bushfire events, including the devasting 1967 fires. Rob and his family have lived on the property since 2006. Their involvement in the *Sparking Conversations* project spanned the initiative's duration, culminating in practical steps toward improved fire preparedness.

Having always been mindful of bushfire risk, Rob initially assumed that the 1967 bushfires represented the worst-case scenario. However, through discussions with experts involved in the project, he realised that future fires could be even more severe due to factors such as climate change, increased fuel loads, and urban expansion into bushland.

As part of the Fire Adapted Gardens initiative, Rob and Helen also opened up their property to University of Tasmania researchers, who collected a myriad of plant samples for conducting testing for flammability to help inform the development of a guide for local residents. They found the exercise useful and interesting, and were glad to be able to contribute to the profiles of the flammability and vegetation vulnerability for the Lenah Valley area.

KEY LEARNINGS AND ACTIONS TAKEN

- **Risk and Readiness Assessment:** The assessment highlighted vulnerabilities on their property, such as vegetation close to the house, which he is now prepared to remove if necessary.
- **Change in Bushfire Response Plan:** Initially planning to stay and defend, Rob and his wife have shifted their approach towards early evacuation, developing a detailed plan for transporting animals and essential documents.
- **Community Engagement:** Rob played a key role in establishing a local WhatsApp group to facilitate communication among residents about bushfire preparedness. Despite some challenges in engagement, he remains committed to fostering community resilience.
- **Continuous Monitoring:** Rob now actively monitors TasALERT and weather forecasts to anticipate high-risk days and respond proactively.

Through their participation in the *Sparking Conversations* project, Rob and Helen have significantly enhanced their personal and community preparedness for future bushfire events. Their property is now better equipped for fire season, and they have a well-developed evacuation plan. Additionally, their efforts in community engagement have helped initiate broader discussions on bushfire resilience in their valley.

CASE STUDY 3

‘FROM SPARKS TO STRENGTH’

Building a resilient and connected Mount Nelson

Prior to the project, emergency preparedness in Mount Nelson largely relied on individual efforts and the work of local volunteer firefighters.

However, through the project’s activities, residents have built new relationships, established critical communication pathways, and developed a shared sense of responsibility for bushfire and emergency preparedness.

BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY NETWORK

- The Mount Nelson Community Association (MNCA) itself was formed alongside the project, creating an organised platform for residents to collaborate on preparedness and resilience initiatives.
- The project provided an opportunity for residents to meet, discuss local challenges, and exchange knowledge in a way that had not been possible before.
- Forums and community events encouraged two-way dialogue, allowing residents to voice concerns, share experiences, and receive direct input from emergency services and Council representatives.

FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS AND INFORMATION SHARING

- Neighbourhood gatherings and social events helped break down barriers between residents, particularly those who had not previously been engaged in emergency preparedness discussions.
- The exchange of contact details in small street groups has created informal support networks, allowing neighbours to look out for one another in times of crisis.
- The project facilitated greater access to government, emergency services and key stakeholders, ensuring the community now has clearer communication channels to seek guidance and support when needed.

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

- The project sparked a shift in mindset, with more residents recognising their role in shared responsibility for preparedness rather than relying solely on emergency services.
- Community members are more likely to check in on neighbours, especially vulnerable residents such as the elderly or those with mobility issues.
- The Association plans to continue annual forums and local preparedness initiatives, ensuring that emergency planning remains a consistent and evolving priority.

A PLATFORM FOR FUTURE INITIATIVES

- The community now sees the value of broadening emergency preparedness beyond bushfires, incorporating resilience planning for extreme weather, power outages, and even future pandemics.
- Discussions around creating a community hub have gained traction, highlighting the need for a dedicated space where residents can regularly meet, share resources, and support one another.
- The project has inspired conversations about long-term sustainability and resilience, including food security, water management, and urban greening.

Overall, the project has left a lasting impact by fostering a stronger, more engaged, and proactive community. Mount Nelson residents are not only better prepared for emergencies but also more connected, making their suburb safer and more resilient in the face of future challenges.

CASE STUDY 4

‘CULTIVATING RESILIENCE’

Research-based bushfire resilient gardens and policy design

The increasing severity of bushfires in Tasmania, exacerbated by climate change, has highlighted the need for practical strategies to mitigate fire risk in residential areas.

The interface between urban areas and bushland has expanded, increasing the potential for fire to spread into residential communities. Previous bushfire events, including the 1967 Tasmanian fires, demonstrated the role that vegetation plays in fire propagation. Research led by fire expert Dr. David Bowman has focused on assessing the flammability of common garden plants to better understand their contribution to bushfire risk.

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The study involved collecting and testing more than 100 commonly used garden plants to measure their combustion characteristics. Findings identified Tasmanian native species such as Man Ferns, Old Man’s Banksia, and Mother Shield Ferns as highly flammable due to their burn rate and intensity. The research emphasises the importance of strategic vegetation management rather than indiscriminate removal of plant species.

FLAMMABILITY GUIDE AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The flammability guide was developed to assist residents in making informed decisions about garden design and plant selection. Key recommendations include:

- Identifying highly flammable species and managing their placement within gardens.
- Establishing defensible space around homes by reducing vegetation density and fuel loads.
- Avoiding overhanging branches and limiting vegetation near structures to prevent ember attack.
- Implementing fuel-free zones and reducing the presence of fire-prone ground cover.

The guide provides practical recommendations to minimise fire spread while maintaining biodiversity and aesthetic value in urban gardens.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The research findings have been disseminated through public engagement initiatives, online resources, and local government collaborations. Copies of the guide have also been shared with local nurseries and garden centres boosting greater collaborative opportunities between local Councils, the University and garden and landscaping intermediaries. The flammability guide is intended to be updated as further plant species are tested, ensuring ongoing improvements in fire preparedness strategies.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The development of the flammability guide has underscored the importance of ongoing research and policy adaptation. Recommendations for further action include:

- Continued research into plant flammability to refine guidance.
- Integration of fire-adaptive landscaping principles into local planning regulations.
- Ongoing education initiatives to ensure community awareness and preparedness.
- Strengthened collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and residents to enhance bushfire resilience.

CASE STUDY 5

‘EMPOWERING GREATER HOBART’

Cost-effective bushfire resilience solutions

The demonstration property initiative under the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project is a crucial step towards educating and empowering community members.

By showcasing practical and affordable methods to enhance bushfire resilience, the initiative aims to inspire residents to undertake similar measures at home. Moreover, modifying community assets to be more bushfire-resilient not only mitigates risks but also prepares and supports communities during and after a fire. This proactive approach fosters a culture of preparedness and strengthens community resilience.

KEY PROPERTIES AND UPGRADES

Sandford Hall (Clarence)

- **Importance:** Located next to a ‘Nearby Safer Place’ Sandford Oval, and used for community events.
- **Upgrades:** Landscaping modifications, sealing gaps and vents, and installing ember protection measures.
- **Impact:** Enhances building security, reduces fire risk, and serves as a model for the community.

Collinsvale Hall (Glenorchy)

- **Importance:** A focal point for local events in a remote, bushfire-prone area.
- **Upgrades:** Vegetation management, ember proofing, and structural improvements.
- **Impact:** Increases the hall’s resilience, providing a safer refuge for the community.

Private property, Cascade Road (Hobart)

- **Importance:** Managed by Housing Tas, located near bushfire-prone areas.
- **Upgrades:** Focus on landscaping to reduce radiant heat impact and ember attack.
- **Impact:** Enhances fire resistance, making the property a safer home for residents.

Sandfly Hall (Kingborough)

- **Importance:** A cherished timber building used for various community activities.
- **Upgrades:** Landscaping improvements and structural fortifications.
- **Impact:** Improves building resilience, ensuring it remains a valuable community asset.

KEY LEARNINGS AND ACTIONS TAKEN

These properties are now more equipped to withstand bushfire threats, and their enhancements are visible examples for the community to emulate, showcasing how simple, low-cost actions can significantly improve the resilience of homes and community assets to bushfires. The initiative not only strengthens individual properties but also fosters broader community resilience and awareness.

CASE STUDY 6

‘FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION’

Strengthening Community Resilience

Through *Sparking Conversations*, the City of Hobart has strengthened its approach to community resilience, demonstrating the power of localised engagement and tailored initiatives in fostering connected, prepared, and empowered communities.

The Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action (SCIA) project was designed to enhance community connectedness and build social resilience in bushfire-prone neighbourhoods across greater Hobart. Through direct engagement, collaboration with local organisations, and tailored initiatives, the project aimed to increase awareness, preparedness, and the capacity of communities to respond to emergencies. This case study explores the effectiveness of SCIA, highlighting key outcomes, challenges, and best practices for fostering long-term resilience.

SCIA has played a crucial role in enhancing community connectedness and social resilience across the City of Hobart, particularly in bushfire-prone neighbourhoods. Kimbra Parker, Manager of Community Programs at the City of Hobart provided insights into the project’s impact, challenges, and key learnings.

INCREASED BUSHFIRE AWARENESS AND RISK UNDERSTANDING

The project has significantly increased bushfire awareness and risk comprehension across the Local Government Area (LGA). Areas such as Mt Nelson and Lenah Valley, which already had higher levels of risk perception, showed stronger engagement, while South Hobart had lower levels of participation. The project effectively raised awareness of risks such as ember attack and shifting fire intensities due to climate change.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INTEREST

Interest in bushfire preparedness was notably higher in neighbourhoods with previous fire experience or proximity to the urban interface. Door knocking and direct engagement methods proved to be highly effective, surpassing traditional mailouts. Tailoring events to specific communities rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach helped drive engagement.

COUNCIL’S ROLE IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The City of Hobart integrates community resilience into its broader emergency management strategy, focusing on response, recovery, and resilience-building. The newly established City Resilience Unit primarily supports practical responses, while the Community Programs team works on strengthening social resilience. Regional collaboration with other Councils and the implementation of training programs such as Resilience Canopy Training have been key steps in building community preparedness.

COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The project focused strong partnerships through existing networks like South Hobart Resilience Inc and targeted outreach initiatives. Engaging with local events and neighbourhood activities

CASE STUDY 6

‘FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION’

Strengthening Community Resilience cont.

strengthened these ties, with personalised support provided to individual property owners through tailored resources.

CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Challenges faced during the project included:

- **Limited scope:** Target areas were small, which restricted broader outreach.
- **Labour-intensive engagement:** The project relied on temporary staff, making continuity difficult. Recruiting skilled personnel and leveraging partnerships helped mitigate this issue.
- **Seasonal engagement fluctuations:** Bushfire preparedness interest waned in winter but surged in summer. Adaptive communication strategies and continued community education addressed this challenge.
- **Cross-organisational coordination:** Maintaining commitment from partner organisations was difficult over the project’s 30-month duration. Establishing clear accountability and consistent engagement with stakeholders was key.
- **Lack of community infrastructure:** South Hobart lacked a central hub for engagement, requiring innovative approaches such as leveraging local leaders and alternative venues.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The project empowered communities by enhancing awareness, confidence, and social connections. It’s emphasis on small, incremental actions demonstrated that even minor initiatives can make a significant difference. While formal evaluations are yet to be conducted, existing research supports the link between strong social ties and improved disaster recovery outcomes.

SUSTAINING LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT

To ensure lasting impact, the City of Hobart has developed:

- Contact referrals for partnering Councils and online resources for continued community access
- Dedicated staff to maintain and promote these resources beyond *Sparking Conversations*
- Plans for future multi-hazard social resilience programs, subject to funding.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE INITIATIVES

Some communities, particularly Mt Nelson and Lenah Valley, have demonstrated strong leadership and the capacity to sustain SCIA-inspired initiatives. While engagement varied across neighbourhoods, the project successfully fostered greater local involvement in emergency preparedness.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The success of SCIA highlights several best practices for community resilience programs:

- **Early identification of local leaders and networks** is essential for strong community buy-in.
- **Personalised engagement, such as door knocking**, builds trust and fosters stronger relationships.
- **Mapping community assets** (people, facilities and networks) improves project effectiveness.
- **Team dynamics and skilled staff** are critical for successful project delivery.
- **Maintaining partner accountability** ensures long-term commitment and sustainability.

CASE STUDY 7

‘EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES’

Building bushfire resilience in Kingborough

Bushfire preparedness is a critical aspect of community safety, particularly in high-risk areas like Kingborough.

***Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* (SCIA) has played a pivotal role in enhancing bushfire awareness, strengthening social networks, and equipping local residents with the knowledge and tools needed to respond effectively to emergencies.**

Kingborough Council, through its participation in *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* (SCIA), has significantly enhanced bushfire awareness and preparedness in its communities. By fostering engagement, facilitating knowledge-sharing, and building social resilience, the Council has empowered local residents to take proactive steps in disaster preparedness.

This case study highlights the key learnings and fundamental strategies that contributed to the project’s success.

KEY LEARNINGS AND IMPACT

Increased bushfire awareness and risk understanding

Before SCIA, community understanding of bushfire risk varied. Post-implementation there is a heightened awareness of the factors influencing bushfire risk, including climate, fuel loads, and topography. This understanding has driven proactive risk mitigation efforts.

Strong community engagement and participation

Kingborough Council successfully engaged its residents through well-attended events and widespread information-sharing initiatives. Community members demonstrated high levels of interest and participation across all aspects of emergency preparedness.

Collaborative approach to emergency management

Through its dedicated Community Resilience Program, the Council has actively supported initiatives that strengthen community resilience, including:

- Providing information and resources
- Facilitating knowledge-sharing
- Encouraging capacity building
- Promoting community engagement
- Strengthening social networks
- Conducting risk assessments

Effective on-ground delivery

Kingborough Council collaborated with SCIA in planning and facilitating key activities such as community forums and Risk and Readiness Assessments. While SCIA led direct engagement efforts (eg. door knocking and individual assessments), the Council maintained an advisory and strategic oversight role.

CASE STUDY 7

‘EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES’

Building bushfire resilience in Kingborough cont.

Building community connectedness
The project leveraged local organisations and community groups, ensuring meaningful engagement and ownership. Identifying community leaders helped disseminate information and reinforce the importance of preparedness.

Tailored approaches to engagement
Personalised methods, such as door knocking and Risk and Readiness Assessments, proved invaluable. These assessments provided targeted advice on property modifications and bushfire survival planning, leading to real behavioural change - evidenced by improved preparedness during the Bonnet Hill fire incident.

Addressing engagement challenges
Recognising that different communities engage in different ways, the project offered multiple participation avenues, including forums, one-on-one assessments, and online resources, ensuring inclusivity.

Long-term capacity building
SCIA fostered sustainable partnerships and platforms for community voices, strengthening networks that will endure beyond the project. The initiative has empowered communities to lead and facilitate their own resilience-building efforts.

Ensuring sustainability
Kingborough Council is exploring ways to sustain SCIA’s impact, including the potential recruitment of a dedicated local Project Officer to continue resilience-building initiatives.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR OTHER COUNCILS

- **Collaboration:** Strong partnerships between the project team and local government.
- **Community Connectedness:** Building social networks to enhance resilience.
- **Tailored Risk Assessments:** Delivering personalised advice to simplify complex information and drive actionable change.

CONCLUSION

The SCIA project has empowered Kingborough communities to take ownership of their bushfire preparedness and resilience. Through strategic collaboration, targeted engagement, and sustainable community-led initiatives, the Council has set a benchmark for fostering long-term disaster preparedness and recovery capacity.


WHERE TO FROM HERE?
PLAN:
1. Salvage items into car. Block gutters & fill.
2. Close doors, tape windows
3. Wet blankets/tarp over high risk areas
4. Bring in hoses
5. Tune radios into local stations
6. Fill bath + sinks + buckets
7. Get out fire beaters
- cotton clothes
- leather boots
- protective hats
Dräger X-plore 3300 + ABEK1Hg-P3RD
SONY

Where to from here?

Overall, the *Sparking Conversations, Igniting Action* project has been a worthwhile and rewarding pilot, enabling innovative place-based approaches that have resulted in better prevention, preparation, response and an ability to recover from bushfire risks for our local communities.

Through the evaluation of the project, a number of recommendations are noted here for consideration. Recognising the audience of this report, a range of endorsements have been identified based on stakeholder roles and responsibilities, capabilities and capacities.

Local residents and communities

Responding to the increasing risk of bushfire in and around greater Hobart and Tasmania more generally, requires a shared responsibility from all stakeholders, including local communities and individual residents, to commit and take action against bushfire risks.

Raising awareness and ensuring an appreciation of the risks has been the biggest barrier for how effectively local communities have engaged and responded to the efforts of SCIA, and subsequently which of the twelve participating neighbourhoods have stood to benefit the most from the project outputs. That being said, there is plenty of work still to be done to ensure that all residents and communities are provided with the same knowledge, information, and support to help those individuals to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from a bushfire. There remains a significant proportion of people who are disengaged from the conversation around bushfire - that fail to recognise the significance, importance or acknowledge the risk that our communities face in this regard. This will remain as an ongoing concern for SCIA as it is with any other bushfire campaign or similar activity conducted by the Tasmania Fire Service and other agencies.

Some steps that local communities, groups and individual residents could consider are outlined as follows:

- Continue to build capacity and capability through raising awareness, getting educated, and heeding official advice by taking necessary steps to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from bushfire as it relates to individual residents' homes and property (refer to Community Support Toolkit)
- Take advantage of opportunities to become more informed around bushfire risks as they relate to your home, property and family - actively participate by attending local events, forums, meetings, fire preparedness sessions, and other initiatives offered by community groups and organisations, local government, and state government agencies and services.
- Familiarise with your surroundings, neighbours and connect with your community through hosting or facilitating local street meets, working bees, and other social gatherings to discuss and engage around bushfire risk, preparedness and how to respond and recover collectively.
- Get involved in local activities, groups and organisations and support initiatives that are bushfire related
- Initiate a community contact network (ie. a phone tree or WhatsApp group) to better connect with people in your local neighbourhood regarding bushfire information and awareness (or make sure to connect with an existing network if there is one for your area)
- Take advantage of the many free resources that are available from organisations like the Australian Red Cross and develop a community plan, making sure to consider those in your community who may be vulnerable, isolated or not currently engaged around the discussion of bushfire.

Local government

The role of local government in Tasmania as prescribed by the *Local Government Act (1993)* is to:

- provide for the health, safety and welfare of the community
- represent and promote the interests of the community
- provide for the peace, order and good government of the municipal area.

In keeping with this, it is important to recognise the role that Council plays performing its roles and responsibilities in emergency management. Local governments serve as a linchpin when it comes to community and are well placed to facilitate and assist residents in advancing bushfire preparations by drawing on their vast networks. Being the closest tier of government to local communities, Councils know their communities best, are able to be more responsive to local needs and requirements and be an effective conduit to engage across sectors, stakeholders and tiers of government enabling access to necessary support.

With this in mind, the following recommendations are presented that are within the scope for local Councils to consider:

- Social resilience building - the opportunity to continue working directly with all communities (broader focus, not just localised neighbourhoods to generate more interest and buy-in).
    - Support Community Resilience role(s) within each Council to work directly with and within local communities around community capacity building initiatives
    - Provide support to groups and organisations in developing community action plans relevant to multi-hazards affecting local communities
    - Support local groups to facilitate events and forums aimed at raising awareness and communicating information within local communities
- Retain relationships and information sharing provisions with key stakeholders including Tasmania Fire Service, Tasmania Police, SES, Bureau of Meteorology, and support agencies and services.
- Continuation of risk and readiness assessment opportunities - scope opportunities whereby sponsored and/or bi-partisan support could be explored to subsidise the cost of independently conducted assessments for local residents
- Roadside verge clearing - consider extending investment to undertake road verge clearing works or develop a maintenance program that considers adopting a similar methodology to that delivered through SCIA in minimising fuel loads whilst retaining local natural biodiversity values in key areas. Such an approach must consider increased collaboration with other parts of the Council such as NRM, Infrastructure, Open Space/Parks and Reserves etc to maximise approach across Council land, reserves and road verges in a broader effort to reduce and mitigate neighbourhoods against bushfire risk.
- Consider opportunities and/or pathways for broadening scope of resources developed through SCIA, to cover multi-hazard approaches such as flood and storm events.
- Remain open to considering collaborative opportunities with other LGAs in Tasmania, to trial and/or deliver initiatives relevant to bushfire risk and/or multi-hazard implications.
- Engage with local communities to facilitate the development of community profiles and plans to enable communities to respond, support and build capability in before, during and after a bushfire emergency.

Government agencies

State government services play a critical role as the lead agencies in any emergency. Agencies such as Tasmania Fire Service (TFS), Tasmania State Emergency Service (SES), Tasmania Police and Ambulance Tasmania respond to a range of emergencies and are responsible for delivering emergency management services across the state. The TFS partners with other arms of government who have land management responsibilities including Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) and the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) to educate communities on bushfire preparedness and fire safety, and work to prevent, resource, manage and respond to bushfires.

From a community fire safety perspective, the agency provides an extensive library of resources and information, however feedback from SCIA participants indicates that most feel overwhelmed by the amount of information, and struggle to know where to begin or how to put into the practice, the advice given through these sources. Initiatives like the TFS' Bushfire-Ready Challenge

go a long way toward addressing these concerns, raising awareness, informing, and preparing the community about the threat of bushfires. However, as they cover the entire state, their ability to offer localised and personalised support is limited.

Some key recommendations for the state emergency service, specifically the TFS are outlined below:

- Ensuring commitment and funding for continuing community outreach initiatives, updated resources and information.
- Increase funding to expand the number of outreach dedicated roles within the TFS Community Education area, enabling greater capacity and engagement with local communities to provide a more localised approach, particularly in high bushfire risk areas.
- Ensure more efficient and consistent communication channels between TFS and all local government with respect to upcoming programs, initiatives and opportunities for collaboration, and engagement with key staff within the agency.

For government in general, the following is recommended:

- Greater recognition of the important role that local government plays in supporting emergency management and its associated response and engagement with local communities.
- Increased funding and support for enabling local government to more efficiently and effectively deliver emergency management support.
- More emphasis and commitment to supporting local government with resources and capability to work more closely with their local communities in resilience building.
- Develop a comprehensive directory of Non-Government Organisation services and offerings and share across local government and other stakeholders to build familiarity and establish relationships.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

Non-government organisations are an essential partner in the delivery of emergency response, as well as building community resilience and support, wellbeing and empowerment for local communities. There are a wide range of service organisations available to meet the needs of local areas, however the familiarity of most is largely unknown or unclear as to what range of services are available and what areas they service.

The most recognised NGO being Australian Red Cross who can offer coordination of relief efforts, provide medical assistance, offer shelter and supplies, sharing best practice, and influencing public policy. They also offer wellbeing and capacity training through the delivery of mental health first aid and other programs catering to emergency responders, businesses, and community.

Based on the experienced encountered and feedback shared by stakeholders, the following recommendations are made:

- Improved collaboration with local government in an effort to build resilient communities, through more effective planning to maximise resources, building synergies with local initiatives to capitalise on engagement opportunities.
- Connect with local government to promote services, to build relationships that better inform and educate the sector about how NGOs can support and assist local communities.
- Continue to provide relevant training opportunities, in particular mental health first aid and psychological first aid, along with other capacity training offerings to build resilience for local emergency responders and community members.
- Continue to offer a range of services that meet the demands and needs of individual communities, in a collaborative effort that empowers community to resile from bushfire emergencies.

APPENDICES



Figure 1:

TARGET AREA	DEMOGRAPHICS	BUSHFIRE RISK PROFILE
Austins Ferry	2021 Census data for Austins Ferry: • Median age 39 • Highest education - year 10 or below 24.8%; bachelor degree level and above 15.7% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 5.8% • Top occupations - professionals 16.%; technicians and trades workers 15.1%; clerical and administrative workers 13.8%; community and personal service workers 13.5% • Housing - owned with mortgage 45.6%; owned outright 33.1%; renting 20.2% • Language used at home - 9.3% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Punjabi 1.6%; Malayalam 1% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 13.5%; arthritis 11.4%; asthma 10.2%	This urban neighbourhood sits just to the east of a vast area of bushland. Although it feels suburban, ember attack from the nearby hills puts this community at risk.
Claremont	2021 Census data for Claremont: • Median age 38 • Highest education - year 10 or below 29.2%; certificate level III 16.8%; bachelor degree level or above 14.4% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 6.7% • Top occupations - technicians and trades workers 16.7%; community and personal service workers 16%; labourers 14.3%; clerical and administrative workers 14.1%; professionals 12.1% • Housing - rented 34.9%; owned with a mortgage 31.9%; owned outright 28% • Language used at home - 10.7% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Nepali 1.5%; Punjabi 1.3% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 13.6%; arthritis 13.1%; asthma 9.8%	The community of Upper Claremont sits right on the bushland-urban interface, with vast areas of bushland adjacent. This neighbourhood is at heightened risk of both ember attack and direct flame fronts.
West Moonah	2021 Census data for West Moonah: • Median age 34 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 31.2%; year 10 or below 19.1%; year 12 13.3% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 3.6% • Top occupations - professionals 19.7%; community and personal service workers 17.7%; technicians and trades workers 13.1%; labourers 12.4%; clerical and administrative workers 12.3% • Housing - rented 41%; owned with a mortgage 29.1%; owned outright 27.8% • Language used at home - 28.1% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Nepali 7.4%; Mandarin 2.7%; Punjabi 2.4% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 12.1%; arthritis 8.3%; asthma 7.1%; diabetes 4.7%	The urban community of West Moonah sits just to the east of a large expanse of bushland. This neighbourhood is at particular risk of ember attack.

Figure 1:

TARGET AREA	DEMOGRAPHICS	BUSHFIRE RISK PROFILE
Lenah Valley	2021 Census data for Lenah Valley: • Median age 37 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 42.1%; year 10 or below 13%; year 12 12.8% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 2.1% • Top occupations - professionals 34%; community and personal service workers 14%; managers 13.2%; clerical and administrative workers 12.9%; technicians and trades workers 10.5% • Housing - owned with mortgage 37.4%; owned outright 35.1%; renting 25.7% • Language used at home - 18.2% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Mandarin 2.7%; Nepali 2.5%; Greek 1.1% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 11.5%; arthritis 8.7%; asthma 8.2%	Lenah Valley sits on the bushland-urban interface. Limited escape routes and heavy bushland surrounding the suburb puts this neighbourhood at risk from ember attack and direct flame fronts.
South Hobart	2021 Census data for South Hobart: • Median age 38 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 51.7%; year 12 13%; year 10 or below 8.6% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 1.7% • Top occupations - professionals 42.1%; managers 13%; community and personal service workers 12.2%; clerical and administrative workers 10% • Housing - owned outright 34.2%; rented 32%; owned with a mortgage 29.5% • Language used at home - 17.1% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Mandarin 3.5%; Nepali 1.4%; German 1%; Cantonese 1% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 10.7%; arthritis 9%; asthma 7.3%	This community sits on the bushland-urban interface and is at particular risk from bushfire coming from the northwest. Direct flame fronts, ember attack and a single vehicle entry point puts this neighbourhood at heightened risk.
Mount Nelson	2021 Census data for Mount Nelson: • Median age 40 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 49.8%; year 12 12.1%; year 10 or below 9.9% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 2% • Top occupations - professionals 38.8%; managers 13.5%; community and personal service workers 12.6%; clerical and administrative workers 9.7% • Housing - owned outright 39.7%; owned with a mortgage 30.8%; rented 28.2% • Language used at home - 20.9% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Mandarin 6.4%; Cantonese 1.1% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 10.6%; arthritis 9.1%; asthma 8.3%; heart disease 4%	This bushland suburb on the edge of Hobart is at heightened bushfire risk from direct flame attack and ember attack. The tall trees, narrow roads and limited escape routes makes this neighbourhood particularly vulnerable.

Figure 1:

TARGET AREA	DEMOGRAPHICS	BUSHFIRE RISK PROFILE
Bonnet Hill	2021 Census data for Bonnet Hill: • Median age 46 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 49.6%; year 10 or below 14.3%; year 12 8.8%; certificate level III 8.4% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 1.9% • Top occupations - professionals 43.4%; managers 19.3%; clerical and administrative workers 12.4% • Housing - owned outright 53.6%; owned with a mortgage 40.8%; rented 5% • Language used at home - 3.4% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Russian 0.8%; German 0.6; Greek 0.6%; Vietnamese 0.6% • Health - arthritis 11.8%; asthma 9.9%; mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 7.8%	This community has an urban/rural mix. With vast areas of bushland to the north, and one main road dissecting the suburb, there are limited escape options. This neighbourhood is at heightened risk of both ember attack and direct flame fronts.
Leslie Vale	2021 Census data for Leslie Vale: • Median age 41 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 27.3%; year 10 or below 18.1%; certificate level III 16.5%; year 12 14.3%; • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 2.6% • Top occupations - professionals 26.3%; managers 17.1%; technicians and trades workers 15.6%; clerical and administrative workers 12.2%; sales workers 10.7% • Housing - owned with a mortgage 50.8%; owned outright 31%; rented 11.9% • Language used at home - 10.3% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Mandarin 1%; Korean 1%; Afrikaans 0.8%; Tamil 0.8% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 12%; arthritis 11%; asthma 8.4%; heart disease (including heart attack or angina) 4.3%	This rural community is almost entirely surrounded by bushland hills and has limited escape options. This community is particularly vulnerable to ember attack.
Longley	2021 Census data for Longley: • Median age 44 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 29.2%; certificate level III 12.9%; advanced diploma and diploma level 12.4%; year 10 and below 12.4% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 1.7% • Top occupations - professionals 24.6%; technicians and trades workers 18.7%; managers 11.9%; community and personal service workers 11.9%; clerical and administrative workers 11.9% • Housing - owned with a mortgage 51.7%; owned outright 39.1%; rented 8% • Language used at home - 10.3% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - German 1.7% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 9.5%; arthritis 8.7%; asthma 7.1%	Rolling hills and vast areas of bushland are all part of the rural community of Longley. Ember attack and direct flame fronts will impact this community, and with limited escape routes, this community is at heightened risk.

Figure 1:

TARGET AREA	DEMOGRAPHICS	BUSHFIRE RISK PROFILE
Risdon Vale	2021 Census data for Risdon Vale: • Median age 34 • Highest education - year 10 and below 32.9%; year 12 18.2%; certificate level III 15.1%; bachelor degree level and above 8.6%; • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 13% • Top occupations - labourers 18.3%; community and personal service workers 17.5%; technicians and trades workers 17.2%; clerical and administrative workers 12.2% • Housing - owned with a mortgage 41.4%; rented 34.2%; owned outright 22.1% • Language used at home - 6.4% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Urdu 0.5%; Mandarin 0.4%; Nepali 0.3%; Spanish 0.3%; Thai 0.3% • Health - mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 13.3%; asthma 10.2%; arthritis 8.8%	This urban community is almost entirely surrounded by bushland hills and is particularly vulnerable to ember attack.
Mount Rumney	2021 Census data for Mount Rumney: • Median age 44 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 33.2%; certificate level III 19%; year 10 or below 15.4%; advanced diploma and diploma level 13% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 1% • Top occupations - professionals 31.6%; technicians and trades workers 20.9%; managers 13.3%; community and personal service workers 10.8% • Housing - owned outright 48.6%; owned with a mortgage 45.9%; rented 3.7% • Language used at home - 3.7% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Afrikaans 2.6%; Thai 1.7% • Health - arthritis 9.2%; mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 7.6%; asthma 6.6%; cancer (including remission) 5.6%	The residents of Mount Rumney are nestled into the bush of this rural neighbourhood. The tall trees, narrow windy access route and dead-end roads mean this community is at heightened risk of ember attack and direct flame fronts.
Sandford	2021 Census data for Sandford: • Median age 44 • Highest education - bachelor degree level and above 24%; certificate level III 20.2%; year 10 or below 18.1%; advanced diploma and diploma level 10.4% • Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 2.7% • Top occupations - professionals 22.5%; technicians and trades workers 19.7%; managers 13.5%; community and personal service workers 12.8%; clerical and administrative workers 12.4% • Housing - owned with a mortgage 49.9%; owned outright 42.7%; rented 4.6% • Language used at home - 4.5% of households where a non-English language is used • Top languages used - Greek 0.3%; German 0.3%; Afrikaans 0.2%; other Australian indigenous languages 0.2%; French 0.2% • Health - arthritis 11.3%; mental health condition (including depression or anxiety) 8.1%; asthma 7.4%	The residents of Sandford are deeply nestled amongst the bushland. With one main road running north to south, there are limited escape options for this rural community. The tinder dry bushland blocks are susceptible to both ember attack and direct flame fronts.

Figure 2:

PROPERTY	GENERAL CONSTRUCTION	REASON FOR SELECTION
Sandford Hall 949 South Arm Road, Sandford	Large weatherboard building with tin roof. Appears well constructed but requires maintenance. Landscaping around the building is well maintained	• Property is mapped as being bushfire prone. • Building and landscaping improvements are broad. • Public access is good - no occupancy impingement. • Building is listed as a 'nearby safer place' and a possible evacuation centre
Collinsvale Hall 10 Hall Road, Collinsvale	Large mostly tin-clad building. Appears well constructed and well maintained. Landscaping immediately around the building is well maintained.	• Property is mapped as being bushfire prone. • Building is located adjacent to a registered 'nearby safer place'. • Good access is available to the building and no occupant impingement is envisaged • Building is also a community focal point.
'Benjamin Court' 21-27 Cascade Road, South Hobart	Group of 10 units. Masonry construction with tin roof. Appears well constructed and landscaping is reasonable.	• Property is not mapped as being bushfire prone or considered a threat. However, the property is next to a bushfire prone area and may be considered a threat. • While the scale of this building may otherwise be considered an issue, the ability of the upgrades to be viewed from the street is possible to reduce possible occupant impingement.
Sandfly Hall 811 Sandfly Road, Sandfly	Weatherboard building with tin roof. Appears well constructed and reasonably well maintained. Landscaping is good.	• Property is mapped as being bushfire prone. • Range of building and landscaping improvements are broad. • Good public access and no occupant impingement.

Figure 3:

Local Government Area	Location and Description	Local Government Area	Location and Description
City of Hobart	**Street/Location:** Nelson Road - No. 550 to Signal Station **Distance:** 1.19km **Proposed Works:** Lopping of overhead tree limbs deemed to be at risk and removal of near surface and elevated fuel	City of Hobart	**Street/Location:** Kalang Ave - Lumeah Ave to City of Hobart/Glenorchy City Council boundary **Distance:** 345m **Proposed Works:** Removal of near surface and elevated fuel
City of Hobart	**Street/Location:** Broughton Ave - Entire **Distance:** 345m **Proposed Works:** Removal of near surface and elevated fuel	Kingborough Council	**Street/Location:** Sandfly Road - Allens Road to Bluegate Road **Distance:** 5km **Proposed Works:** Removal of near surface and elevated fuel and lower branches removed where necessary
Kingborough Council	**Street/Location:** Sandfly Road - Huon Highway to Wiggins Road **Distance:** 1.19km **Proposed Works:** Clearing of near surface and elevated fuels	Clarence City Council	**Street/Location:** Canopus Drive - No. 39 to Cul-de-sac **Distance:** 850m **Proposed Works:** Clearing of near surface and elevated fuels
Clarence City Council	**Street/Location:** Mount Rumney Road - Entire **Distance:** 3.5km **Proposed Works:** Removal of overhanging branches and canopy thinning and clearing of near surface and elevated fuels	Clarence City Council	**Street/Location:** Centauri Drive - Grahams Road to Canopus Drive **Distance:** 270m **Proposed Works:** Clearing of near surface and elevated fuels