

Bushfire Management & Economics – What’s the Connection?

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“Understanding the use and usefulness of economic evaluation in bushfire management decision-making”

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Economics in bushfire management

Economic decisions impact the fire and emergency services sector every day. But not enough is known about how to use economics to best support decisions on competing priorities, efficiencies and the broader values and preferences in our society (Ohlson *et al.* 2006, Cary *et al.* 2012).

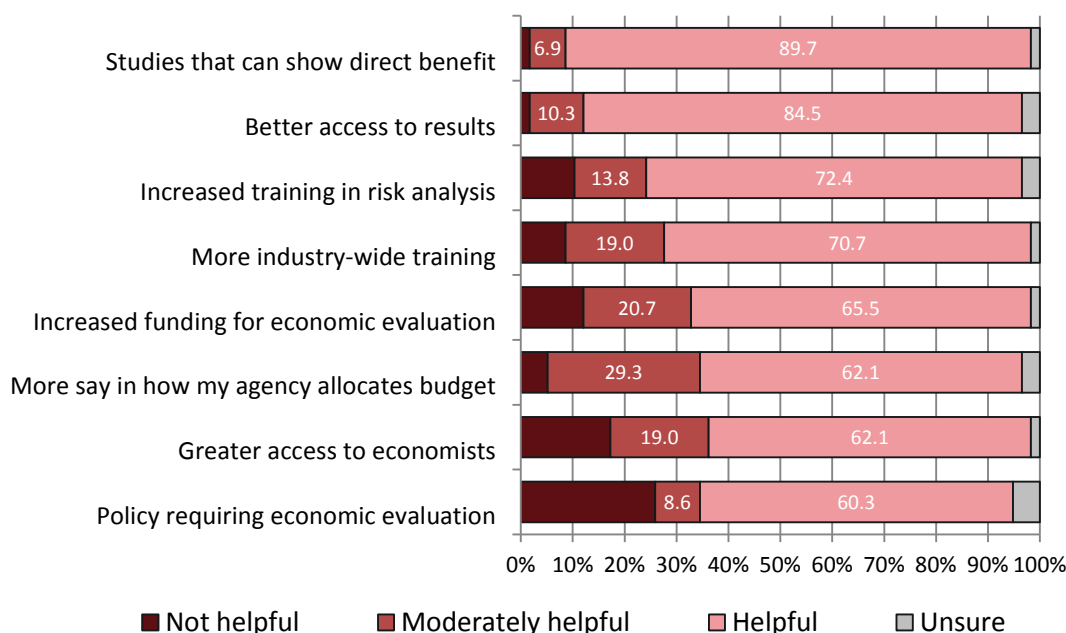
Survey of bushfire managers & policy professionals

We surveyed bushfire managers and policy professionals employed in the fire and emergency services industry across Australia. The objectives of the survey were to:

1. Improve understanding of the **value of, and priorities for, economic information**
2. Identify where agencies could benefit from economic information to **guide and prioritise investment, defend budgets and influence policy**
3. Identify industry needs and priorities for economic **support and training**
4. Improve the understanding between end-users and economics researchers

Survey sections - containing further detailed questions
1. Respondents role in bushfire decision making
2. Use of information to support bushfire management decisions
3. Respondents perspectives on priorities for funding and bushfire management
4. Usefulness and relevance of economic evaluation
5. Factors that encourage and discourage the use of economic evaluation
6. Respondents training and background

Q: How helpful do you think each of the following would be in encouraging more use of economic evaluation in bushfire management decision making in your organisation? (shortened response options; n = 58 in all cases)



Preliminary survey results

- **59** respondents across all Australian states and territories, and New Zealand.
- **43%** of respondents had participated in training courses, seminars or workshops on economics in the past.
- **66%** of respondents feel that bushfire management requires economic evaluation, but **76%** feel that decisions about bushfire management investment should not be based solely on economic evaluation.
- **78%** of respondents feel that a lack of expertise & knowledge about economic evaluation represents a barrier to greater use of economic evaluation in their organisation.
- Respondents feel that the current level of funding from State Governments (**72%**) and Federal Government (**69%**) is not adequate given risks posed by bushfires.
- **93%** of respondents feel that the public should take greater responsibility for mitigating bushfire risk to their own life and property.

Conclusions

Although economic evaluation is used in bushfire management decision-making (both formally and informally), it is not ranked highly in decision-making processes. However, it is considered an important tool in bushfire management decision-making, provided it is not used in isolation.

Lack of expertise and knowledge about economic evaluation is the biggest barrier to the use of economic evaluation, indicating a greater need for industry-wide training in economic evaluation techniques. The use of economic evaluation studies showing direct benefit to organisations, as well as better access to these results would help encourage the use of economic evaluation.

Reference:

Cary G, Collett E, Gill, M, Clayton H, Dovers S (2012) Future Scenarios for Australian Bushfires: Report on a Bushfire CRC Workshop. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 27 (3): 34-40.

Ohlson D, Berry T, Gray R, Blackwell B, Hawkes B (2006) Multi-attribute evaluation of landscape-level fuel management to reduce wildfire risk. *Forest Policy and Economics* 8: 824– 837.