

FIRE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT GROUPS: Final Stages

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BACKGROUND LITERATURE:

An important research theme is to understand Australia's history and relationship with natural resource management. This research will contribute to knowledge of community-based natural resource management, bushfire history and research and, more generally, the decentralisation of governance. The literature on community-based natural resource management suggests that decentralised approaches offer improvements over orthodox, 'command and control' or regulatory approaches. These benefits include: enhanced sensitivity to and deployment of local knowledge in environmental management; management which is more responsive to context and local priorities and imperatives and thus more effective; and improved efficiency in management by harnessing local agency and energy in implementations (Gray et al. 1999; Li 2002; Scott 1998). As a result, advocacy of decentralising governance has been widespread (Lane et al. 2004). This research will be the first examination of decentralised environmental management in relation to fire management.

THE RESEARCH:

This research is concerned with investigating the efficacy of bushfire planning and management. Research has been conducted in South Australia and Western Australia, examining two volunteer bushfire brigades and their surrounding communities. In conducting this investigation, it's primary motivation has been the potential establishment of a model for 'Fire Catchment Management Groups'. 'Fire Catchment Management Groups' could potentially involve volunteer fire fighters, community members, local government and land management agencies, where together they would produce a 'Community Action Plan'. This research is concentrating on how these groups might be established and their potential for effective bushfire management. The overall aim of this project is to investigate the following question:

"How might volunteer community organisations best be utilised in the management and prevention of bushfires?"



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Forty semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with volunteer fire fighters, along with 322 face-to-face surveys with members of the local communities. This data is now being used to address the following questions:

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES IN THE FORMATION AND OPERATION OF VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT?

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT?

WHAT ARE THE IMPEDIMENTS TO COORDINATED STATE AND NON-STATE COORDINATED ACTION IN BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT?

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERISM?

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