

## Chapter 5

### World Heritage Convention and remote area fire management

5.1 This chapter discusses Australia's obligations under the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) in relation to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA). It also comments on world best practice in remote area fire management.

#### Australia's World Heritage Convention obligations

5.2 The World Heritage Convention sets out the duties of States Parties to identify and delineate cultural and natural heritage sites, and to protect, conserve, present and transmit those sites to future generations. Article 5 outlines the measures that States Parties are encouraged to take:

- (1) to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes;
- (2) to set up within its territories, where such services do not exist, one or more services for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage with an appropriate staff and possessing the means to discharge their functions;
- (3) to develop scientific and technical studies and research and to work out such operating methods as will make the State capable of counteracting the dangers that threaten its cultural or natural heritage;
- (4) to take the appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage; and
- (5) to foster the establishment or development of national or regional centres for training in the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage and to encourage scientific research in this field.<sup>1</sup>

5.3 The World Heritage Convention establishes a process by which each State Party nominates property forming part of its cultural and natural heritage. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and

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1 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, (23 November 1972) (entry into force 19 December 1975), Article 5, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/%20-%20Article1> (accessed 30 November 2016). Also see Articles 3 and 4.

Natural Heritage (World Heritage Committee) uses these inventories to establish the World Heritage List, which is updated and published at least every two years.<sup>2</sup>

5.4 Australia was the seventh State Party to sign the Convention, ratifying it in 1974,<sup>3</sup> and in 1982, the TWWHA was inscribed on the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee. To be included on the list, the TWWHA was determined to be a site of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which meets four natural and three cultural criteria.<sup>4</sup>

### **Compliance with the World Heritage Convention**

5.5 The Australian and Tasmanian Governments signed an Intergovernmental Agreement to determine their respective roles and responsibilities under the World Heritage Convention. In particular, the Australian Government delegated management responsibilities to the Tasmanian Government, the lead agency being the Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania (PWS).<sup>5</sup>

5.6 In relation to bushfires, Tasmania assists Australia to meet its obligations through a combination of measures. These include a management plan (*Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999*), *Fire Mitigation Plans* (to reduce the occurrence and impact of fires) and specific legislation (to protect TWWHA values in relation to prescribed burning activities).<sup>6</sup>

#### ***Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999***

5.7 The *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999* (the Management Plan 1999) sets out the policy framework and management prescriptions to guide management of the TWWHA for a period of 10 years.<sup>7</sup> It contains specific prescriptions which include fire management.<sup>8</sup>

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2 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, (23 November 1972) (entry into force 19 December 1975), Articles 8 and 11 (accessed 30 November 2016).

3 Australian Government, [States Parties which have signed the World Heritage Convention](http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/%20-%20Article1), <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/%20-%20Article1> (accessed 30 November 2016).

4 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), [The Criteria for Selection](http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/), <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/> (accessed 30 November 2016).

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) met criteria (iii), (iv), (vi), (vii), (viii), (ix) and (x): see UNESCO, [New Inscribed Properties \(1982\)](http://whc.unesco.org/en/newproperties/date=1982&mode=list), <http://whc.unesco.org/en/newproperties/date=1982&mode=list> (accessed 30 November 2014).

5 Tasmanian Government, *Submission 24*, pp. 8–9.

6 Tasmanian Government, *Submission 24*, p. 9. This section focuses only on the *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999*.

7 Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania (PWS), [Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 1999](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=6364), 1999, p. 6, <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=6364> (accessed 30 November 2016).

8 PWS, *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Management Plan 1999*, 1999, p. 107 (accessed 30 November 2016).

5.8 Within this prescription, wildfire suppression is to take precedence over all other management activities. In the event of a wildfire, the Incident Controller uses a fire suppression plan to assign a priority to four objectives (life, environment, targeted fire regimes, property and infrastructure). However:

If no suppression plan is available, priorities will be set taking into account the values and assets at risk, legal requirements (such as the requirement to prevent fires escaping from the WHA) and the resources available for their protection, subject to the following qualifications where relevant:

- first priority will always be the protection of human life;
- second priority will be the protection of rare and threatened fire sensitive species and communities; and
- third priority will be the protection of substantial and valuable infrastructure.<sup>9</sup>

5.9 The Management Plan 1999 specifically states:

It is the responsibility of the [PWS], on behalf of the Commonwealth, to manage fire to meet its obligations under the World Heritage Convention, the *Fire Service Act 1979*, and common law. At some times, in some locations, these obligations are incompatible.<sup>10</sup>

5.10 The committee notes the intersection between the second priority in the Management Plan 1999 and the argument that the Tasmanian Government did not appropriately prioritise environmental assets during the 2016 bushfires in the TWWHA (see chapter 4).

#### ***Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 2014***

5.11 The Tasmanian Government noted that the Management Plan 1999 is now 'outdated'. Accordingly, a new management plan is being developed for the TWWHA (*Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 2014* (the Draft Management Plan)).<sup>11</sup>

5.12 The Tasmanian Government submitted that the Draft Management Plan is in line with existing policy and frameworks for fire management in Tasmanian Parks. The principal planning documents are: the *Fire Management Policy 2011*; the *Fire Planning Policy 2009*; and Regional Strategic Fire Management Plans.<sup>12</sup>

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9 PWS, *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Management Plan 1999*, 1999, p. 108 (accessed 30 November 2016).

10 PWS, *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Management Plan 1999*, 1999, p. 106 (accessed 30 November 2016).

11 Tasmanian Government, *Submission 24*, p. 10. Also see: Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), [Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan Project](http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/conservation/tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area/new-tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area-management-plan), <http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/conservation/tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area/new-tasmanian-wilderness-world-heritage-area-management-plan> (accessed 30 November 2016).

12 Tasmanian Government, *Submission 24*, p. 10.

5.13 The Draft Management Plan states that the overriding principle of the *Fire Management Policy 2011* is the prioritisation of bushfire suppression and:

...all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that the impact of planned fires, prevention and fire-suppression activities on natural and cultural values is minimised.<sup>13</sup>

5.14 The Draft Management Plan noted that the PWS uses the Bushfire Risk Assessment Model, one element of which is 'values at risk' (see chapter 4). However, 'there is limited knowledge of the impacts of fire on some of these values and not all values are currently included'.<sup>14</sup>

5.15 The committee notes that the Draft Management Plan is in the final stages of the approval process and is likely to include recommendations from inquiries into the management of the 2016 bushfires.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Comments on the Draft Management Plan*

5.16 Some submitters and witnesses referred to the Management Plan 1999, comparing its fire management prescription for wildfire suppression with the Draft Management Plan. For example, the Tasmanian Greens pointed out that the latter document omits several explicit bushfire 'references':

- the fact some parts of the TWWHA are destroyed by fire and will not recover or regenerate;
- the need to maintain a rapid response capability;
- the need for continuing research on fire in the TWWHA; and
- the need for monitoring of the effectiveness of fire strategies.<sup>16</sup>

5.17 Similarly, The Wilderness Society (Tasmania) and Greenpeace commented on the omission of fire management prescriptions that prioritise the protection of rare and threatened fire sensitive species and communities:

The government has not explained the reason for this deletion and there seems no logical reason why such provisions shouldn't be articulated in the statutory management framework for the TWWHA. [The Wilderness Society (Tasmania) and Greenpeace] are deeply disturbed by this deletion.

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13 PWS, [Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 2014](http://iplan.tas.gov.au/Temp/TrimDownload_774628.PDF), p. 155, [http://iplan.tas.gov.au/Temp/TrimDownload\\_774628.PDF](http://iplan.tas.gov.au/Temp/TrimDownload_774628.PDF) (accessed 30 November 2016).

14 PWS, *Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan 2014*, p. 155 (accessed 30 November 2016). Also see p. 10.

15 Tasmanian Government, *Submission 24*, p. 10. Also see: Mr John Whittington, Secretary, DPIPW, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 61.

16 Tasmanian Greens, *Submission 22*, p. 8. The submission notes that the plan focuses only on fuel reduction burns and fuel stove policy.

Also see: Mr Nicholas Sawyer, Vice President, Tasmanian National Parks Association, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 32.

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It appears to be another expression of the Tasmanian Government's hostility to proper protection of the natural environment.<sup>17</sup>

5.18 Mr Nicholas Sawyer from the Tasmanian National Parks Association suggested that maybe PWS 'went a bit overboard in terms of removing some of the prescriptions about fire', due to a current push to reintroduce traditional burning of country. He speculated that, if the Draft Management Plan is finalised without reintroduction of the fire management prescription, this could place at risk the OUV of the TWWHA:

It basically takes the policy imperative of protecting fire-sensitive species down a couple of rungs, if not more than that, on the priority ladder compared to what we have in the 1999 plan. If that translates on the ground in terms of firefighting resources to an equal deprioritisation of those...the next time we have a really bad fire situation it could well result in the loss of major areas of the Gondwanan vegetation that form part of the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage area.<sup>18</sup>

5.19 The committee notes that it has been recommended to the World Heritage Committee by one of its Reactive Monitoring Missions to request Australia 'to ensure that the issue of fire management is fully reflected in the revision of the draft Management Plan for the property'.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Government responses*

5.20 At the Canberra public hearing, the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy (DEE) indicated that the Draft Management Plan does not sufficiently comply with the World Heritage Convention or the Australian World Heritage management principles. An officer noted however that 'the plan is still being finalised' and 'our expectation is that the plan that is finalised by Tasmania will [comply]'.<sup>20</sup>

5.21 Mr John Whittington, Secretary of Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), confirmed that the approach to describing fire had been 'a little underdone' and will be revised in the final version of the Draft Management Plan:

...the final plan will have a little more material in there around fire planning. But certainly the position of Parks is very much around protecting the OUV of the property...suppression of fire is very much driven by the

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17 The Wilderness Society (Tasmania) and Greenpeace Australia Pacific, *Submission 27*, p. 24.

18 Mr Nicholas Sawyer, Vice President, Tasmania National Parks Association, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 35. Also see p. 34. Mr Sawyer noted that this result could contribute to species extinction in the TWWHA.

19 UNESCO, *State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List*, WHC/16/40.COM/7B.Add, 10 June 2016, p. 81, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/40com/documents/> (accessed 30 November 2016).

20 Mr Chris Johnston, Assistant Secretary, Heritage Branch, Department of the Environment and Energy (DEE), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 10.

OUV of the property, so that is a very high priority in the mix immediately after life...[the final plan] will have a slightly more fulsome description of fire management than the previous plan and I also expect it to go to being explicit about the prioritisation of OUV.<sup>21</sup>

### **Upholding World Heritage values**

5.22 Although the Tasmanian Government is responsible for managing the TWWHA, the Australian Government is obliged as a State Party to protect the TWWHA and its World Heritage values. The obligation is given effect through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (the EPBC Act) which requires the Australian Government to:

- use its best endeavours to ensure a plan for managing the property in a way that is not inconsistent with the World Heritage Convention and the Australian World Heritage Management principles, in co-operation with the relevant state or territory; and
- take all reasonable steps to ensure it exercises its powers and performs its functions in relation to the property in a way that is not inconsistent with:
  - the World Heritage Convention; and
  - the Australian World Heritage management principles; and
  - if the property is on the World Heritage List and a plan for managing the property has been prepared—that plan.<sup>22</sup>

5.23 In addition, section 324 of the EPBC Act enables the Australian Government to give financial or other assistance to the Tasmanian Government for the protection or conservation of the TWWHA. The state benefits from various measures, including annual funding of \$3.4 million (which is at least matched by the Tasmanian Government).<sup>23</sup> In 2015, the Australian Government committed an additional \$10.2 million over four years to strengthen management efforts.<sup>24</sup>

5.24 The DEE noted that funding priorities are discussed with the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council (Tas), before being submitted to the Commonwealth for review. A number of activities have been funded to increase Tasmania's capacity to manage and reduce the impacts of fires in the TWWHA.<sup>25</sup>

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21 Mr John Whittington, Secretary, DPIPWE, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 61. Also see: Ms Joanne Nathan, Director, Natural Heritage, DEE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 19.

22 Sections 321–322 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).

23 DEE, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

24 Tasmanian Government, *Submission 24*, p. 9.

25 DEE, *Submission 23*, p. 3; DEE, answer to question on notice, pp. 2–3, received 10 November 2016.

### ***Comment on Australia's obligations***

5.25 Submissions and evidence provided little direct comment on Australia's obligations as a State Party to the World Heritage Convention. An exception was the Tasmanian Greens, who submitted that Australia's compliance with Article 5(2)–(3) has been demonstrably 'insufficient'. The Tasmanian Greens cited especially DPIPWE's lack of resources, the evidence base for modelling, and reduced research funding.<sup>26</sup>

5.26 Another exception was the DEE which affirmed the Australian Government's commitment to supporting Tasmania to strengthen its management of the TWWHA (primarily through funding measures), and emphasised its involvement in the development of the Draft Management Plan:

The Department of the Environment has worked closely with [DPIPWE] while it reviews and revises the management plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness. In particular, the [DEE] has provided advice to [DPIPWE] on Australia's World Heritage Convention obligations and application of the Australian World Heritage management principles.<sup>27</sup>

5.27 The DEE advised that it was also active during the 2016 bushfires, maintaining contact with Tasmanian officials to ensure the Australian Government well understood the damage to the TWWHA and its World Heritage values. Reports were provided to the World Heritage Committee regarding the state of conservation. Further reports will follow once DPIPWE has completed its impact assessment and developed rehabilitation plans for the World Heritage Area.<sup>28</sup>

### **World best practice in remote area fire management**

5.28 Remote area fire management is an arduous and labour intensive activity that requires extensive training, and high levels of physical and mental fitness.<sup>29</sup> Some submitters and witnesses praised Australia for its world best practice in this area.

5.29 The Bushfire and Natural Hazards Co-operative Research Centre (BNH CRC) described Australia as 'one of the leaders in this type of firefighting...[with a] national capability that is called upon as the need arises'. Its submission highlighted especially the focus on national capabilities:

No one state can maintain all the resources required for firefighting on the worst days, as this would be cost prohibitive and wasteful. In Australia there are interstate agreements for sharing of resources, including remote

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26 Tasmanian Greens, *Submission 22*, p. 7.

27 DEE, *Submission 23*, p. 4. Also see p. 3.

28 DEE, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

29 Mr Greg Cooper, Branch Secretary, United Firefighters Union of Australia–Tasmania Branch (United Firefighters Union (Tasmania), *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, pp. 26 and 29; Mr Mark Bryce, Director (Operations), DPIPWE, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 70.

area firefighting teams. Indeed these agreements also stretch to international agreements which have included New Zealand, USA and Canada.<sup>30</sup>

5.30 Mr Mark Crossweller, Emergency Management Australia, said:

States and territories have probably the world's leading capacity in remote firefighting. Often bitter experience and loss of life have taught us how to get better at that capability. There were over 1,000 personnel in the remote area firefighting capability, as I understand it, that was put into Tasmania from adjoining states. They talk about over 2,000 rotations, so that is 1,000 people rotating at least twice and some three times. That is a substantial weight of attack in remote area firefighting capacity.<sup>31</sup>

5.31 The BNH CRC submitted that Australia's coordination of national resources, policy, practice, operations and research is 'unique' and 'world leading'.<sup>32</sup> As an example, it noted the Australian Disaster Resilience Institute (formerly the Australian Emergency Management Institute), a partnership between the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, the Australian Red Cross, the BNH CRC and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD).<sup>33</sup>

#### *Areas for improvement*

5.32 Submitters and witnesses did not disagree with the assessment of Australia's world-leading position. However, detection and planned burning were highlighted as areas that could be improved for future fire management and suppression in the TWWHA.

#### *Bushfire detection*

5.33 Some submitters argued that the TWWHA needs earlier bushfire detection.<sup>34</sup> Professor David Bowman described how the dominance of combustible organic soils and large areas of closed canopy vegetation complicate the early detection of lightning fires:

Organic soils can smoulder for long periods underground before spreading under favourable (favourable or unfavourable?!) fire weather conditions. Closed canopies can obscure small surface fires. Detection of fires in trackless areas is difficult and relies on *aerial surveillance and remote sensing*.<sup>35</sup>

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30 Bushfire and Natural Hazards Co-operative Research Centre (BNH CRC), *Submission 4*, p. 3.

31 Mr Mark Crossweller, Director General, Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General's Department (AGD), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 10.

32 BNH CRC, *Submission 4*, p. 3. Also see: Mr Mark Crossweller, Director General, Emergency Management Australia, AGD, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 11.

33 BNH CRC, *Submission 4*, p. 3. The Australian Disaster Resilience Institute aims to deliver improved practices and outcomes through the delivery of a range of education, professional development and information sharing programs and services across Australia.

34 See for example: Tasmanian Greens, *Submission 22*, p. 5; Cleanairtas, *Submission 29*, p. 3, which referred to real time data provided by Global Position and Tracking System Pty Ltd.

35 Professor David Bowman, *Submission 13*, p. 2 (emphasis in the original).

5.34 However, AGD, DPIPWE and Professor Bowman noted that aerial surveillance can be problematic, due to hazardous flying conditions and concealment by cloud cover. Instead, Professor Bowman suggested that there is greater scope for improved lightning detection networks, which can then be surveilled by drones.<sup>36</sup>

5.35 AGD and BNH CRC are considering the use of drones in fire management. However, there might be some unresolved issues with this technology. Mr Crowweller, AGD, explained:

How do you incorporate those technologies into operations? It is one thing to get a picture, but it is another thing to bring it in in an intelligent way that makes sense to the operational commanders and can be interpreted properly.<sup>37</sup>

5.36 An officer from DPIPWE commented that any remote area technology that can help detect bushfires would be helpful, as time had been lost in trying to detect the 2016 bushfires in the TWWHA:

Part of the delay was we had two or three days where there was smoke reported but no follow-up flame. We were flying around in helicopters and spotter flights to try and identify if there was fire, how big it was and could we do anything about it? We had drizzle, low cloud and some patches of rain during those first few days, so it was very difficult to identify those. There was not enough heat being put out by the fires, so you could not even use an infrared scan to pick them up. So a hell of a lot of time was spent just trying to identify did we have a problem or didn't we?<sup>38</sup>

#### *Planned burning operations*

5.37 Fire management in the TWWHA is logistically challenging, due to a multiplicity of factors—remoteness, terrain, weather, the occurrence of organic soils, closed canopy vegetation and a paucity of maintained fire breaks.<sup>39</sup> In these conditions, some submitters and witnesses indicated that there is a need for more planned burning operations.

5.38 The National Aerial Firefighting Centre observed that, although a 'proven, efficient and cost-effective technique' for fire suppression, firefighting aircraft have

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36 Professor David Bowman, *Submission 13*, p. 2. Also see: Mr Mark Crowweller, Director General, Emergency Management Australia, AGD, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 13; Mr Mark Bryce, Director (Operations), DPIPWE, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 64.

37 Mr Mark Crowweller, Director General, Emergency Management Australia, AGD, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 18.

38 Mr Mark Bryce, Director (Operations), DPIPWE, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 64. Also see: Mr Gavin Freeman, Deputy Chief Officer, TFS, *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 68.

39 See for example: McDermott Aviation, *Submission 15*, p. 3.

limitations—such as that they are usually effective only when used in a coordinated effort with ground crew.<sup>40</sup>

5.39 Dr Andrew Sullivan from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) similarly indicated that aerial fire suppression becomes pointless without ground crew activity once fire intensity reaches a maximum limit:

Once a forest fire gets to a point where it starts throwing spots, the ability of the aerial suppression to actually control the fire drops off. Even below that limit, aerial suppression will not extinguish a fire without having somebody on the ground to put the fire out. Aerial suppression will knock the flames down and reduce the intensity for a short period, and that can enable somebody to go in and put the fire out. But after that period of time, the fire will then build back up again if there is nobody there to put the fire out.<sup>41</sup>

5.40 Professor Bowman warned that traditional methods of fire suppression can be ineffective in the TWWHA. In the case of:

- water bombing—peat (organic soil) fires can burn underground for many weeks;
- firebreaks—the remote and intractable terrain prevents the use of heavy machinery in most areas; and
- digging trenches—causes significant and ongoing environmental impacts.<sup>42</sup>

5.41 Professor Bowman supported the creation of firebreaks through planned burning operations to reduce the areal extent of landscape fires, in particular elective and careful planned burning of treeless buttongrass moorlands. He noted:

There is evidence that fires burning under moderate fire weather conditions will stop on recently burnt buttongrass moorlands. Targeted burning of buttongrass moorlands is therefore a critical preventative methodology to reduce the extent of large fires.<sup>43</sup>

5.42 Professor Bowman argued that ground crews should conduct these burns, as they have greater situational awareness and the ability to work under a wide range of weather conditions, compared to aerial burns. He suggested:

There is scope to use properly trained remote area fire-fighting personnel (possibly drawn from NGOs and Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities with

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40 National Aerial Firefighting Centre, *Submission 18*, p. 3. Also see: McDermott Aviation, *Submission 15*, p. 3, which commented on the significant impact of early aerial fire suppression.

41 Dr Andrew Sullivan, Principal Research Scientist and Team Leader, Bushfire Behaviour and Risks, CSIRO, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 November 2016, p. 8. Also see: Mr Greg Cooper, Branch Secretary, United Firefighters Union (Tasmania), *Committee Hansard*, Launceston, 2 November 2016, p. 27.

42 Professor David Bowman, *Submission 13*, p. 3.

43 Professor David Bowman, *Submission 13*, p. 3. Also see p. 1.

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a stake in land management) working outside the fire season to undertake such targeted burning.<sup>44</sup>

### **Committee view**

5.43 As a State Party to the World Heritage Convention, Australia has obligations in respect of the natural and cultural heritage of the TWWHA. While certain responsibilities have been delegated to the Tasmanian Government, the Australian Government ultimately remains responsible for the protection, conservation, etc. of the World Heritage property.

5.44 Based on the information received, it would appear that the Australian Government is complying with its World Heritage Convention obligations. There appeared to be a prompt response to the 2016 bushfires in the TWWHA, in line with emergency management arrangements; and the DEE works closely with DPIPWE in relation to management of the TWWHA, most notably in the recent preparation of a new management plan that complies with the international obligations. Further, the Australian Government provides funding in a number of areas—such as management, research and national aerial firefighting capability.

5.45 However, the 2016 bushfires in the TWWHA have helped to highlight that, in the absence of the public spotlight, there are matters that have not received sufficient attention and that are only now being recognised and addressed.

5.46 While the Tasmanian Government appears to have been properly more engaged in the routine management of the TWWHA, in the committee's view the Tasmanian and Australian Governments should be working together at a strategic level to protect and conserve this valuable wilderness area. At present, there appears to be a slight tendency for the Australian Government to delegate much of the responsibility to the Tasmanian Government.

5.47 The committee considers that this is not satisfactory and the Australian Government should have a greater role in supporting the Tasmanian Government to fulfil Australia's World Heritage Convention obligations. Accordingly, the committee makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation 5**

**5.48 The committee recommends that the Australian Government recognise the need to enhance protection and conservation efforts in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area by allocating increased funding:**

- **to the Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania, for appropriate management activities and resources; and**
- **for research projects aimed at providing qualitative and quantitative data specific to climate-related and ecological threats to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (such as dry lightning strike).**

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44 Professor David Bowman, *Submission 13*, p. 3. Also see The Wilderness Society (Tasmania) and Greenpeace, *Submission 27*, p. 25.

**Recommendation 6**

**5.49** The committee recommends that the Australian and Tasmanian Governments:

- **develop options to increase co-operation to ensure that the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is protected and conserved in line with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention; and**
- **work together to ensure strong provisions to protect the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area from bushfire risks are included in the *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan*.**

**Senator Nick McKim**

**Chair**