

Guideline for application of the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) at severely burnt sites

New Guideline for assessing biodiversity values on severely burnt sites

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) has published a guideline to define severely burnt sites and provide technical guidance for application of the BAM on sites impacted by severe bushfires like those experienced in the 2019/2020 season.

This Guideline applies to new proposals required to apply the BAM and to assessments that were partially complete before the site was severely burnt. The purpose of the Guideline is to support accredited assessors to address the technical complexities associated with BAM assessments on severely burnt sites and avoid inconsistencies or delays in the assessment process.

The Department is also looking at other strategies, related to the application of the biodiversity offsets scheme (BOS), to support bushfire affected communities in re-building.

To access the document, visit [Guideline for applying the biodiversity assessment method at severely burnt sites \(PDF 757KB\)](#)

The Department recommends that proponents seek agreement with decision makers on use of the Guideline

The Guideline recommends the proponent discuss with, and seek support from, the decision-maker prior to using the Guideline.

Specifically, agreement should be sought on:

- Whether the impact site (or parts of it) is severely burnt as defined by the Guideline.
- How vegetation integrity should be assessed for severely burnt areas of the impact site.
- How threatened species should be assessed on an impact site that is severely burnt.
- How a partially complete assessment should proceed at an impact site that is severely burnt.

The Guideline provides several options to address these considerations.

Outcomes from an assessment completed on site prior to a severe bushfire may be used to assist in completing the remaining assessment requirements. The approach to completing the remaining assessment should be precautionary and based on the Guideline.

The decision maker may request additional information, as part of the assessment, on the ecological impacts of the severe bushfire.

What is a severely burnt site?

The Guideline describes a 2-step process to determine whether an impact site is severely burnt:

1. Use the Google Earth Engine Burnt Area Map (GEEBAM) tool or use local knowledge to estimate where vegetation may be severely burnt.
2. Qualitative evaluation of certain criteria that describes severely burnt vegetation. This is based on field assessment.

Determination of serious and irreversible impacts (SAlls) should take into consideration the extent and severity of severe bushfire

The Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) or Biodiversity Certification Assessment Report (BCAR) must take into consideration the overall impacts, or likely impacts, of the 2019/2020 bushfire season, when addressing the impact of the proposal on entities at risk of a SAll.

The Guideline recommends that assessors consult with the Department for advice on the most current information, or where they are uncertain on how to address the assessment criteria with respect to severe fire impacts.

Tools are available to support decisions on assessment of severely burnt vegetation and habitat

Google Earth Engine Burnt Area Map (GEEBAM)

The Science Division of the Department has created a state-wide map showing burnt area canopy classes. This is based on a product named the GEEBAM and is updated fortnightly. An image web service links to the data and is now live via the Department's Sharing and Enabling Environmental Data portal (SEED).

<https://datasets.seed.nsw.gov.au/dataset/google-earth-engine-burnt-area-map-geebam>

Fire Extent and Severity Mapping (FESM)

FESM is being developed by Science Division. The data will be published in the coming weeks. GEEBAM is the primary resource for fire severity until the FESM becomes available.

Other resources

To find further information, visit [Understanding the impact of the 2019-20 fires](#) and [Wildlife and Conservation Bushfire Recovery](#).

Further Information and updates

The Department is continuing to work on efforts to support bushfire affected communities and will continue to provide further updates as information becomes available.

If you have any questions about whether rate payers in your local government area will be subject to the biodiversity offsets scheme, or require further information on this Bulletin, please email bam.support@environment.nsw.gov.au.

The Department recommends that decision makers undertake a detailed review of BDARs that have applied the guideline.

Decision makers may seek advice from the Department on BDARs that have applied the guideline.

The Department will monitor any implementation issues as they arise with a view to improving and updating the guideline as required.

For further information and advice please contact

bam.support@environment.nsw.gov.au