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PRESCRIBED BURNING REDUCES FIRE FUEL LOAD

Prescribed burning in parks and reserves has commenced as part of the State Government's strategy to reduce bushfire risk across South Australia.

The first prescribed burn for the season took place in the Murraylands last Friday, and the program will continue today in Kenneth Stirling Conservation Park and Mylor Conservation Park in the southern Mt Lofty Ranges.

Environment and Conservation Minister Jay Weatherill says that the government plans to conduct up to 98 prescribed burns covering more than 16,500 hectares during spring this year and autumn next year.

"These prescribed burns will be undertaken by the Department for Environment and Heritage, ForestrySA and SA Water to reduce fire fuel loads on public land," he said.

"Reducing fuel loads through prescribed burning is very important, because it can make it easier to control a bushfire, help prevent a bushfire spreading to residential areas, and ultimately save people's lives and property.

"A key focus will be the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region where more than 800 hectares in 28 prescribed burns are planned. This area is much higher than in recent years and will protect a range of natural and built assets."

Mr Weatherill says a review of fire management on public land – ordered last year by Premier Mike Rann – had identified strategies to improve cooperation between government agencies.

"As a result, the Country Fire Service, SA Water, DEH and ForestrySA are boosting collaboration in fire management on public lands, including prescribed burning and other bushfire suppression activities.

"Already the four agencies have endorsed a strategy to significantly increase prescribed burning in the Mt Lofty Ranges, demonstrating how an integrated approach will be crucial in being bushfire ready this summer.

"This increase in prescribed burns will be assisted through extra funding to DEH, announced earlier this year, of \$4.5 million over four years, as well as resources from the other agencies."

Mr Weatherill says the window of opportunity for prescribed burns is limited by the weather and vegetation conditions.

“The right combination of fuel moisture contents, temperature, relative humidity and wind speed is needed for a prescribed burn to be conducted safely and effectively.

“This limits prescribed burning to short periods during spring and autumn, and only on certain days when conditions are suitable.

“This is why the joint agency agreement is so important – it enables the Government to take full advantage of the limited opportunities available for prescribed burns.

“Although the Government is doing everything it can to reduce the risks posed by bushfires, private landholders must be responsible for reducing their properties’ vulnerability to bushfires. They must prepare and act to ensure their survival.

“This is being made much easier through changes to the rules about managing native vegetation for bushfire prevention purposes.

“Shortly we will be rolling out an education and information campaign through the media targeting all South Australians, in particular rural and peri-urban communities, with some easy steps on how they can be better bushfire prepared.”

A series of simple fact sheets and a guide detailing the new rules is now available online at www.nvc.sa.gov.au. This information will be available in local council offices shortly.