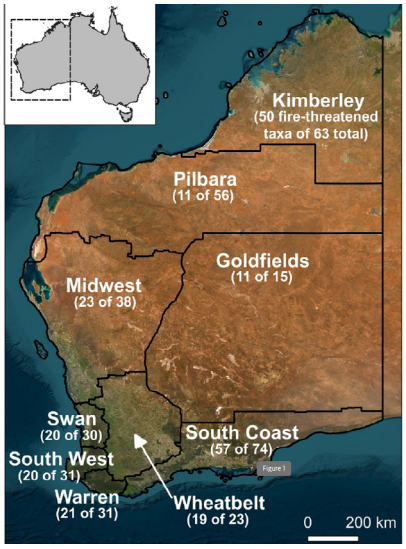
15 WHY DOES DBCA BURN THREATENED SPECIES?

FACTS ABOUT PRESCRIBED BURNING AND WILDFIRE IN SOUTH-WEST FORESTS

Despite the large number of threatened species that are at risk from fire, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) continues to prescribe burn large areas of the state.

Doherty and 27 others, recently published: *Animal taxa threatened by adverse fire regimes in Western Australia.*[1] They considered all WA's threatened animal taxa. Of the 212 taxa reviewed 153 (72%) are considered at risk from adverse fire regimes: 100% of amphibian (3), 91% of mammal (29), 71% of invertebrate (85), 67% of fish (6), 63% of reptile (10) and 61% of bird (20) taxa. All fire-threatened taxa are considered at risk from i**ncreased fire size, frequency or intensity**, while three are also at risk from lack of fire. The management region that has the highest per cent of taxa at risk is the Kimberley (79%) followed by the South Coast (77%). In the south-west forest regions (Swan, South West and Warren) the number of threatened animal taxa at risk from adverse fire regimes is 36 of the 48 (75%). This includes six threatened mammals: the western ringtail possum, woylie, numbat, black-flanked wallaby, quokka and chuditch and four threatened birds: the forest red-tailed, Baudin's and Carnaby's black cockatoos and the Australasian bittern.[1]



DBCA management regions with number of taxa considered at risk from adverse fire regimes and total number of threatened animal taxa in that region from Figure 1 Doherty *et al.*[1]

Despite distance to unburnt vegetation being key to recovery following fire, DBCA burns some incredibly large areas e.g. DBCA 2025-26 Burn Options include WKM_021 in the West Kimberley (6 189 822 ha).[4,5]

Given the large number of threatened species that are at risk from increased fire frequency, why does DBCA prescribe burn so frequently?

Many plants and animals take decades to recover from fire. Prescribed burning return intervals in jarrah and karri forests are 5–7 and 8–11 years respectively, compared with historical wildfire return intervals of more than 80 years.[6]

Given that so many threatened species are at risk from increased fire intensity, why does DBCA indiscriminately ignite prescribe burns from the air and not control them at ground level to reduce intensity and severity and to protect sensitive areas?

Recent prescribed burns have been just as severe as wildfires (see Fact Sheet 12). Only three of DBCA's 13 prescribed burns in 2024-25 in the Frankland and Donnelly districts met DBCA's success criterion for crown defoliation. Most had crown defoliation more than three times the allowable 10%.

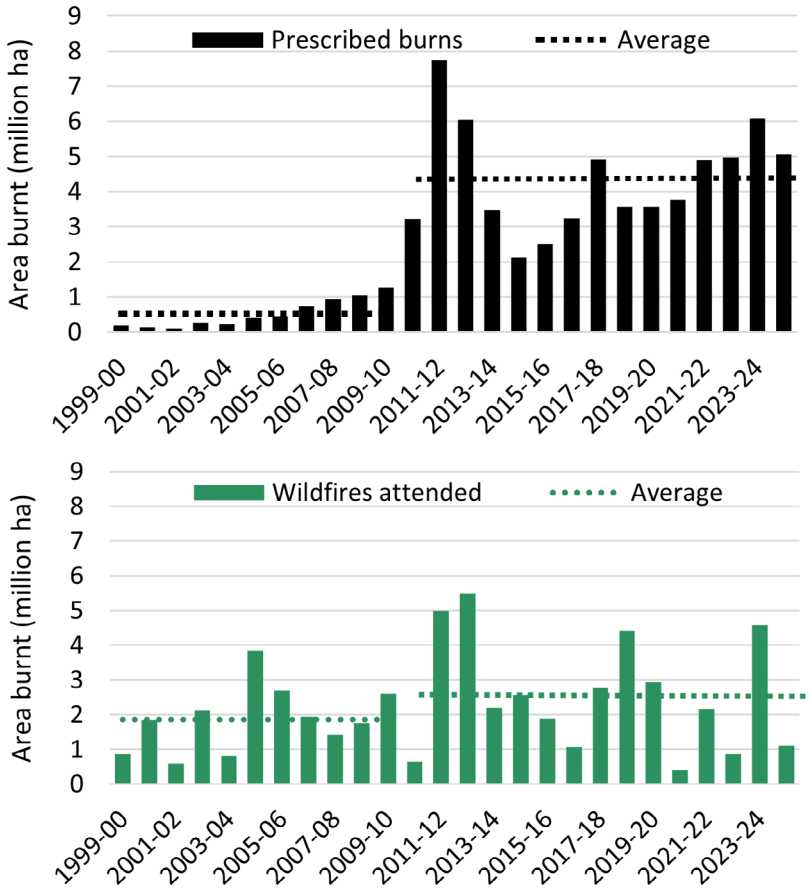
Despite recognising the importance of conservation reserves for biodiversity conservation, DBCA routinely burns them. Why?

DBCA states: "*Western Australia's conservation reserve system is the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation where species, communities and natural processes are offered protection from many external threats and pressures. Conservation reserves provide large areas of intact ecosystems that buffer environmental changes and support resilience in the face of a changing climate.*"[5]

For example, the Willmott Quindinillup burn (15 108 ha; FRK_112) in Mount Roe National Park in the Frankland District was ignited from the air in November 2025. The burn went ahead despite Noongar elders and the Denmark Environment Centre warning DBCA and the government that the burn contained cultural heritage sites and posed a high risk to ecological values.[6] The burn provided no protection for the towns of Denmark, Mt Barker and Frankland as they were more than 30 km away. The West Kimberley Walyarta Conservation Park (230 000 ha) will be burnt this year (2026; part of WKM_021).

While infrequent wildfire is a natural component of the Australian landscape, prescribed burning is not. DBCA's prescribed burning program is a huge and immediate threat to conservation reserves, much greater than climate change, and it contributes greenhouse gas emissions that perpetuate and worsen climate change and its future impacts.

Statewide prescribed burning has increased massively while wildfire area is much the same



Annual statewide prescribed burn and wildfire areas (million hectares) from Department of Conservation and Land Management, Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Parks and Wildlife and DBCA annual reports.

What is the purpose of prescribed burning such large areas when it is not reducing wildfire area?

Before 2005 DBCA did negligible burning outside of the south-west forest regions. Over the last four years DBCA has burnt on average 5.1 million hectares per year in the remote areas of the state. These areas have never experienced prescribed burning at this scale. Traditionally, Aboriginal people moved seasonally throughout the landscape and lit small, patchy fires for hunting, regenerating food and medicinal plants or 'cleaning up country'. The ecosystems will be changed forever, species will be lost and the burning will worsen climate change.

This year (2026) DBCA plans to burn Walyarta Conservation Park (230 000 ha; aerial ignition), a West Kimberley Ramsar wetland, that provides habitat for threatened species listed nationally and/ or internationally, including migratory birds.

There should be an immediate moratorium on DBCA's prescribed burning in remote areas

Prescribed burns drive plant and animal species closer to extinction

- Statewide 72% of threatened species are at risk of extinction from fire of increased size, frequency and/or intensity. [1]
- Fire is recognised as a *key threatening process* under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* for many Western Australian threatened species and ecosystems.[7]
- Woinarski *et al.* quantified threat factors to Australian mammal species.[8] After feral cats, inappropriate fire regimes are the second greatest threat, followed by foxes.
- Changed (unnatural) fire regimes are recognised, world-wide, as a threat to biodiversity.[9]
- Fire destroys native animal habitats and favours introduced species such as foxes, cats and pigs.[2]

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