

Rapid Assessment – Bushfire Damage to Heritage Places

Context

Over the spring and summer months of 2019 and 2020, bushfires raged across large areas of the Australian continent, but were particularly destructive in NSW, Victoria and South Australia. In addition to the loss of houses, farms, towns, schools, businesses, community and research facilities, infrastructure and livelihoods, the nation's natural and cultural heritage were also lost. As bushfires are increasing in regularity and intensity, this rapid assessment sheet has been prepared to assist local government officers and property owners in assessing damage and post-disaster risks to heritage.

Purpose

The purpose of this rapid assessment is to identify the extent of heritage losses and the risks that need to be addressed to protect the surviving heritage and prevent further loss. The form recognises that not all heritage places are included on inventories and that places that are recognised as being locally significant to communities should be included in the census.

The purpose of a rapid assessment is to:

- provide a brief overview of the damage to a place – the type of damage and extent of loss, including to heritage values
- identify the continuing threats or risks to the place that exist as a consequence of the damage, or the ongoing threat of fire or other hazards,
- identify and prioritise actions to address the risks to prevent further loss, and
- identify the immediate needs of property owners for assistance in relation to emergency remedial actions to stabilise or salvage their heritage.

A rapid assessment is not a detailed damage assessment. This will be undertaken at a later date by property owners after the emergency has been dealt with.

Who should complete this form?

In order to avoid adding to the trauma of property owners, this rapid assessment form has been designed to be filled in by council heritage officers or heritage specialists. Property owners can contribute information to the form and should be given a copy of the completed form for their own records.

Site Survey Warning

Note: It is important to be aware of the health risks that may exist because of the fires. Before undertaking an onsite assessment, take the necessary precautions to ensure personal health and safety.

How to complete this form

A Rapid Assessment is a fairly quick assessment.

The form allows for simple tick box answers, but also provides sufficient space for short notes for clarification (eg key words relating to significance could be added).

Record the type of damage (eg. charring, water damage, smoke damage) and the extent to which particular elements have been affected (eg. outbuildings, roof, rear wing, etc).

Draw a quick site plan showing the structures and mark up where damage is (destroyed, damaged or surviving) and any risks/hazards that are apparent. Notes should be specific to the situation and type of damage or the hazard. Hazards may include potential building collapse, roofing could blow away in high winds, not weathertight, asbestos contamination, previously covered elements are now exposed to the elements and potential vandalism, water damage, dispersed shattered glass or solar cells, fire retardant coating to significant elements, etc).

Attach photographs of the place – destroyed, damaged and surviving elements.
Also include photos of hazards where appropriate.

Priorities for site stabilisation, salvage and remediation must be identified.

Privacy

No personal information is required other than the name of the owner (which the Council should already have) and their contact details for providing information on the types or assistance that may become available.

Insurance and financial information

The form does not expect financial details to be added.

The form is designed to identify the needs of the heritage property owners.

Copies of this form

Please return this form to _____ (nominate a central collection point for the council). The form will also be sent to the state heritage authority to enable an update of their database and a copy is to be given to the property owner.

This is not a legal document that holds the owner to account for recovery of their heritage property. It is for general information purposes only.

Adaptation for Digital Data Collection

This form provides a model that may be adapted to specific local needs. It may be used in conjunction with online local and state heritage inventory data.

The key questions may be adapted for digital collection of data (eg. mobile phone app) to enable property information (photos and other data) to be uploaded immediately and linked to GIS coordinates.

Rapid Assessment – Bushfire Damage to Heritage Places

This rapid assessment form is designed for completion by Council heritage officers, although property owners may choose to complete the sheet. This assessment must be completed prior to site clean-up.

Return this completed form to _____

It is important to be aware of the health risks that may exist as a consequence of bushfires. Before working on a fire-affected site, take the necessary precautions to ensure personal health and safety.

Place name, address/GIS location			Date of Fire:	Date of Assessment:
			Name of Assessor: Organisation: Position:	
Property type (eg. residence, farm, public facility, commercial premises, place of worship, etc)			Property owner (name): Contact number:	
Heritage Status – include item/register no.				
National	State	Local	Acknowledged as significant locally, but not listed	

Type of Heritage – you may tick more than one box and add notes			
Buildings (eg. house, shop, church, dairy)		Archaeology (eg. subsurface remains, artefacts)	
Structure (eg. bridge)		Aboriginal (eg. marked tree, art site)	
Landscape (eg. garden, orchard, pastoral land, bushland)		Moveable heritage (eg. collection, machinery, records)	

Briefly describe the place pre-fire Building construction (eg. timber, masonry, steel, roofing); Building complex (eg. homestead, dairy, shed, fences)	Which elements have been damaged and to what extent? (eg. totally destroyed, verandah or one wing lost, shed lost).
What is the place's cultural/heritage significance?	How has its significance been affected?

Describe the damage in more detail	
Roof (eg. roofing, structure)	Windows and doors (eg. burnt, glass shattered)
Walls (eg. loss of structural integrity, cracks in masonry, charring or timber)	Interiors (eg. burnt, smoke damage, water damage)
Foundations (eg. disturbance from large quantities of water dumped on site or mechanical creation of fire breaks)	Collection (eg. destroyed, smoke damage, water damage, charring)
Archaeology (eg. remains uncovered, damaged)	Landscape (eg. fences, plantings)

Describe site hazards presenting a risk to people or heritage	
Hazardous materials present (eg. asbestos, lead, solar cell debris, broken glass)	Structural stability compromised – threat of potential collapse
Environmental hazards present (eg. bio-hazards, unstable trees overhanging structure, gas bottles/chemicals/other fuel present)	Exposure to potential vandalism or theft
Fire retardant present	Potential contamination of water systems from runoff
Exposure / vulnerability to other potential environmental hazards (eg. rain, wind, fire, dust, UV – as relevant to heritage item)	Other

Action Required	Priority H, M, L	Action Required	Priority H, M, L
Security / safety measures required		Place needs to be made weathertight	
Decontamination required		Salvage, inventory and dry storage of contents / movable heritage required	
Structural stabilisation required		Salvage, inventory and dry storage of building materials/elements required (eg. elements for repair and future reinstatement or as reference sample for reconstruction, such as moulding)	
Measures required to protect place from further fire damage		Clean up and sorting of other debris	
Contain runoff to prevent contamination issues		Other	

Insurance Cover/Financial Capacity	Yes/No
Is the property insured?	
Does the owner want to repair/restore/reconstruct heritage?	
Does the owner have the resources or capacity to repair/restore/reconstruct heritage?	
Is assistance required? - specify	

Photographs	

Site Map, aerial and/or sketches	Show structures/elements, identify those damaged and hazards present Annotate as necessary to make current situation clear
	