

## Appendix D Fire history in Australia

This appendix summarises the available information on major bushfire events in each state and territory as far back as records allow. There are many inconsistencies and gaps in the available information because there are no nationally agreed criteria for defining a 'significant fire year' or a 'major fire event'. The available information shows the following:

- Major fire events are a periodic feature in all states and territories.
- The areas of land that are affected by fire continue to be significant.
- There have been 59 recorded bushfire events where there has been loss of life, with a positive trend being the significant decline in the loss of life from bushfires in the last 20 years.
- There have been 24 fire events resulting in major stock losses (defined as more than 1000 head).
- There have been 21 fire events resulting in large-scale loss of houses (defined as more than 50 houses).

**Table D.1 Fire history in Australia, by state and territory**

Date	No. of deaths	Area of fire (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
<b>Northern Territory</b>				
1968–1969		40 000 000		Killarney – Top Springs
1969–1970		45 000 000		Dry River – Victoria River fire
1974–1975		45 000 000		Barkly Tableland, Victoria River district, near Newcastle Waters
2002		38 000 000		
<b>Queensland</b>				
1917	3			Large fires near Hughenden, followed by a fire on Warenda Station
1918 October	2		>100 000 sheep	Fires spread over a huge area from Charleville to Blackall, Barcaldine, Hughenden
1918 October	5			Saltern Creek
1926			Forests, farms, sugar cane, banana plantations and dwellings	South-east corner of Queensland
1940		80 000		Goomeri
1941 July, August		120 000		Julia Creek and Barkly Tableland, Richmond and Cunnamulla
1941 September				Tangorin, Winton, St George, Dalby, Julia Creek, Muttaborra, Longreach
1943		45 000		Dirranbandi
1950 December		49 000	Mostly pasture	Wyandra, Charleville, Adavale, Langlo, Quilpie, Augathella, Cunnamulla, Thargomindah
1951 January, February		2 834 000	40 000 sheep, 550 stock, 650km fencing	Charleville

**Table D.1 (cont'd) Fire history in Australia, by state and territory**

Date	No. of deaths	Area of fire (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
1951–52 season			£2 million (1952 values) in stock and fencing	This was regarded as a bad fire season throughout the state
1954 November	3			Narollah Station, Hughenden area
1964–65 season		92 000	Cypress pine, grazing land, hardwood forest	Roundstone, Dunmore, Fraser Island, Toolara – Tin Can Bay, Badderam Holding
1965 November		97 940		Nara Holding (Croydon district)
1972–73 season		2000	100 cattle	Arcadia Valley
1974 October to 1975 February		7 300 000	95 cattle, 6850 sheep	Thargomindah, Bulloo Shire, Boulia Urandangie, McKinlay Shire
1976 May–December		1 891 600	5km fencing, 5968 sheep, 32 properties, cypress pine forests	Julia Creek, Coalbrook Station, Hughenden, South Burnett, Nanango and Brisbane Valley, Inglewood–Millmerran
1979		421 400	41 000 sheep, 400 cattle	Julia Creek, McKinlay Shire
1990–91 season	3			Two children killed in a fire in Tambo; Bald Knob, Landsborough, Mapleton, Palmwoods (Sunshine Coast hinterland)
1991–92 season	1		3 houses	Mt Tamborine (Gold Coast hinterland)
1992–93 season		40 000	4 houses, several vehicles	Coominya rural residential area near Esk
1994 September–November		5000	Plantation timber (\$35 million)	Beerburrum State Forest
1995 September–November		333 000	9 volunteers severely injured, 23 houses, 93 buildings, fences, livestock	South-east Queensland
1996 October			1 house (Ravensbourne)	South-east Queensland
2000 August			1 volunteer severely burnt, 3 buildings, 3 vehicles	Hundreds of bushfires in south-east (majority deliberately lit)
2001		1 600 000	National park, grazing land	Lawn Hill
2002 October	1	40 000	10 houses, 11 buildings, 30 structures destroyed or damaged	Stanthorpe District, Toowoomba Range, Tara
<b>New South Wales</b>				
1915 November – 1916 January		Not known		Many districts, Holbrook, Howlong
1926 January–February		Not known	Property losses	Junee, Canberra, Albury, Rydal, Wagga Wagga
1926 October – 1927 December	8	>2 000 000		North Coast and Newcastle district, Canberra, Albury, Dubbo, Griffith
1938 December – 1939 January	13	73 000	Many houses, pine plantations	Dubbo, Lugarno, Snowy Mountains, Canberra
1944 November – December	2		150 houses, churches	Blue Mountains, Lochinvar
1951 November – 1952 January	11	>4 000 000		Worst affected district around Wagga Wagga and Pilliga in the north-west
1957 December – 1958	5	>2 000 000	158 houses, many businesses, shops, schools, churches and a hospital	Blue Mountains, Leura
1964–1965 March	5	530 000	Houses, farms, forests	Snowy Mountains, Southern Tablelands, Nowra, Sydney
1968 September – 1969 January	14	> 2 000 000	161 buildings (80 houses)	South Coast (Sept.), much of the coastal and nearby range areas of the state
1969–70	1	280 000		Roto and Riverina areas

**Table D.1 (cont'd) Fire history in Australia, by state and territory**

Date	No. of deaths	Area of fire (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
1972 December – 1973 January		300 000		Kosciusko National Park, Eden, Queanbeyan, Burrinjuck Dam
1974–75	6	4 500 000	50 000 stock, 10 170km fencing	Bourke to Balranald, Cobar Shire, Moolah–Corinya—most of the Western Division
1976–77		74 000	3 houses	Hornsby, Blue Mountains
1977–78	3	54 000	49 buildings	Blue Mountains
1978–79		> 50 000	5 houses, heavy stock loss	Southern Highlands, south-west slopes
1979–80	13	>1 000 000	14 houses	Mudgee, Warringah and Sutherland Shires, majority of council areas, Goulburn and South Coast
1982–83	3	60 000	\$12 million of pines	Blue Mountains, Sutherland and southern NSW
1984–85	5	3 500 000	40 000 stock, \$40 million damage	Western Division
1986		10 000		Mount Kaputar National Park
1987–88	4	180 000		Bethungra, Warurillah–Yanco, south-eastern part of Kosciuszko National Park, Sutherland, Penrith, Wellington
1990–91		>280 000	8 houses, 176 000 sheep, 200 cattle, hundreds of km of fencing	Local government shires of Hay, Murrumbidgee, Carrathool; Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, Cessnock, Hawkesbury, Warringah, Wollondilly, Gosford, Wyong
1991–92	2	30 fires	14 houses	Baulkham Hills, Gosford City, Wyong Shire, Lake Macquarie
1993 December – 1994 January	4	>800 000 (>800 fires)	206 houses destroyed, 80 other premises destroyed	North Coast, Hunter, South Coast, Blue Mountains, Baulkham Hills, Sutherland, most of Royal National Park, Blue Mountains, Warringah–Pittwater
1997 November – 1998 January	3	>500 000 (250 fires)	10 houses destroyed	Hunter, Blue Mountains, Shoalhaven, Menai, Coonabarabran, Padstow Heights, South Windsor – Bligh Park
2001 December – 2002 January		744 000 (454 fires)	109 houses destroyed; 6000 head of livestock	Across 44 local government areas in the Greater Sydney, Hunter, North Coast, mid-north coast, Northern Tablelands, Central Tablelands areas
2002 July – 2003 February	3	1 464 000 (459 fires)	86 houses destroyed; 3400 stock; 151 days of severe fire activity	81 local government areas in Greater Sydney, Hunter, North Coast, Northern Tablelands, Northern Rivers, north-west slopes, north-west plains, Central Tablelands, Southern Tablelands, Illawarra, South Coast
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>				
1938 November – 1939 January		62 500	1100ha of pine forest, 54km of fences	Fires started in NSW, west of ACT. Became a 72km fire front in ACT, affecting, Uriarra, Mt Franklin, Tidbinbilla, Cuppacumbalong, Booroomba and Lanyon
1951 December – 1952 February	2	10 000	2 houses, 40 farm buildings, several Observatory buildings, 450ha of pine, 6 bridges, several hundred kms of fences, 3 vehicles	Molongolo valley, Mt Stromlo, Red Hill, Woden Valley, Tuggeranong, Mugga Hill
1956 December – 1957 January		3125	Primarily pasture and bushland	Ginninderra, Hall, Majura, Black Mountain, Tharwa

**Table D.1 (cont'd) Fire history in Australia, by state and territory**

Date	No. of deaths	Area of fire (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
1979 February		16 500 (ACT, NSW)	2 houses, 3 sheds, machinery, fodder, 5000 sheep, 6 horses, \$200 000 in fencing, fire tanker	Hall, Sutton, Mt Painter, Kambah Pool, Stirling
1982 September, 1983 March		36 000	300ha of pine	Jervis Bay (Sept. 1982), Mt Ainsley, Bullen Range, Gudgeby area
1985 March	1	28 000 (10 000 in ACT)	Total damage of several million dollars, 7000 livestock	Mugga Lane, Red Hill, Mount Majura, Tharwa, Symonstown, Googong – Queanbeyan area of NSW (site of fatality)
2001 December		>1600	500ha of pine forest valued at several million dollars	Coppins Crossing, Yarralumla, Red Hill, Stromlo, Bruce Ridge, Oaks Estate, Wanniasa hills
2003 January	4	>157 000	450 injuries, 488 houses, 100 other structures, Mt Stromlo Observatory, 4000 stock, 16 770ha of pine plantations, 4 bridges, 300 vehicles, total damage >\$350m	Namadgi National Park; Uriarra, Pierces Creek and Stromlo settlements; Cotter, Corin, Tidbinbilla, Mt Stromlo, Duffy, Holder, Chapman, Kamhah, Curtin, Lyons, Murrumbidgee Valley, Coppins Crossing
<b>Victoria</b>				
1851 February (Black Thursday)	Approx. 12	5 000 000; quarter of Victoria	1 million sheep, thousands of cattle	Wimmera, Portland, Gippsland, Plenty Ranges, Westernport, Dandenong district, Heidelberg
1898 February (Red Tuesday)	12	260 000	2000 buildings	South Gippsland
Early 1900s (esp. 1905, 1906, 1912, 1914)		Varied (100 000 in 1914)		Gippsland, Grampians, Otway Ranges
1926	60		Many farms and houses	Noojee, Kinglake, Warburton, Erica, Dandenong Ranges
1932	9			Many districts across Victoria, particularly Gippsland
1938–1939 January (incl. Black Friday)	71	1 520 000	>650 homes and shops, 69 timber mills	Large areas of the north-east and Gippsland, the Otway and Grampian Ranges, and the towns of Rubicon, Woods Point, Warrandyte, Noojee, Omeo, Mansfield, Dromana, Yarra Glen, Warburton, Erica
1942 March	1		100 sheep, 2 farms, >20 homes	Hamilton, South Gippsland – Yarram (burning on a 96km front)
1943 December	10	Thousands		Wangaratta
1944 January	49	>1 000 000	500 homes, huge stock losses	Central and Western Districts
1944 February			Plant works, open-cut mine and buildings	Morwell, Yallourn
1952 February	Several	100 000		Benalla area
1962 January	>8		454 homes	The Basin, Christmas Hills, Kinglake, St Andrews, Hurstbridge, Warrandyte, Mitcham
1965 January	7		6 houses	Longwood
1965 February–March		300 000 forest	>60 homes and shops	Gippsland
		6070 grassland	>4000 stock	
1968 February		1920	64 homes and other buildings	Dandenong Ranges, The Basin, Upwey
1969 January	22	250 000	230 homes, 21 schools/church/hall, >12 000 stock	280 fires broke out, affecting Lara, Daylesford, Bulgana, Yea, Darraweit, Kangaroo Flat, Korongvale

**Table D.1 (cont'd) Fire history in Australia, by state and territory**

Date	No. of deaths	Area of fire (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
1972 December		12 140		Mt Buffalo
1977 February	4	103 000	More than 100 houses and shops, approx. 200 000 stock	Penshurst, Tatyoon, Streatham, Creswick, Pura Pura, Werneth, Cressy, Rokewood, Beeac, Mingay, Lismore, Little River
1978 January	2		1 house; 6500 stock	Bairnsdale
1980 December – 1981 January		119 000		Sunset Country and the Big Desert
1983 January–February	47	461 864	50 houses; >27 000 stock; >2000 homes/shops	Cann River, Mt Macedon, Monivae, Branxholme, Cockatoo, East Trentham, Mt Macedon, Otway Ranges, Belgrave Heights, Warburton, Cudjee, Upper Beaconsfield, Framlingham
1985 January	3	50 800	182 homes, 400 farms, 46 000 stock	Avoca–Maryborough, Little River, Springfield, Melton
1990 December	1		17 homes >12 000 stock	Strathbogie
1995 February		10 000 (mostly forest)		Berringa
1997 January	3	400	41 houses	Dandenong Ranges, Creswick, Heathcote, Teddywaddy, Gough's Bay
1997 December – 1998 January		32 000		Caledonia River area of Alpine National Park, Carey River State Forest
1998 December	5 CFA firefighters	780	1 CFA tanker	Linton
2000 December		29 000		Dadswells Bridge
2002 December		181 400	1 abandoned house	Big Desert
2003 January–March	1 indirectly	1 100 000	41 houses; 9000 livestock	Over 80 fires started by lightning—north-east Victoria, Gippsland
<b>Tasmania</b>				
1897, 1898, 1912				Well-timbered western part of state, north-west coastal region; Huon, Channel, Hobart and New Norfolk districts
1913–14 season			Orchards, buildings, stock	Mt Wellington, Huon
1920				North-west
1921				North-east
1927				South-eastern districts, Tasman Peninsula
1933–34 season				Florentine, Derwent Valley, north-west forests and west coast
1939		9600	Forests, orchards, pastures	Huon, Derwent Valley, west coast, King Island
1940		16 000		Hobart
1945–46 season				Mt Wellington
1951			Hundreds of thousands of metres of marketable timber	Huon
1960–61 season				Parattah, Perth and through Midlands
1963–64 season			Pine plantations	Cambridge, Hobart, Snug, north coast
1966–67 season	62	264 270	>1400 houses, 128 major buildings, 1500 vehicles, 50 000 sheep, 1350 cattle, 1000 pigs, 4800km of fences	South-east, Hobart
1977				Zeehan

**Table D.1 (cont'd) Fire history in Australia, by state and territory**

Date	No. of deaths	Area of fire (ha)	Losses	Location(s)
1980		40 000		Launceston, Hobart, Zeehan
1981			6 houses	Pelverata, Bonnet Hill
1982	1	>40 000		Launceston, Hobart, Broadmarsh
1998		3000	6 houses	Hobart's southern suburbs
2003		41 000		
<b>South Australia</b>				
1938–39				Adelaide Hills
1943–44				Adelaide Hills
1948–49	1			Bridgewater, Gawler, One Tree Hill, Mt Barker, near Wilmington, Port Lincoln
1950				Mt Lofty and grass fire north of Morgan and east of Burra
1951 December	5 firefighters	450 000	Stock, feed, fencing	Adelaide Hills, Woodside, Stirling, Lenswood, and districts in the south-east
1954–55 January	2 firefighters	>40 000	Houses, timber	Mt Lofty Ranges
1957–58 January	8 firefighters	1370	413ha of pine forest	Mt Gambier
1959	1	104 000	\$1 500 000	Kongorong, Wudinna
1960		114 000	'Lots of damage'	Northern part of Yorke Peninsula, Wirrabara, Tintinara
1961				Wilpena Pound
1968–69		900 000	Feed, stock, fences	West of far north region, Murdinga
1974–75		16 000 000		North-west of state (arid and semi-arid zones)
1980				Adelaide Hills
1983	28	160 000	383 homes, forest plantations, conservation parks, >200 buildings	Mt Osmond, Mt Gambier, South Barwon
1985				Adelaide Hills
2001			Approx. 20 buildings	Tulka
<b>Western Australia</b>				
1925	1			Katanning
1930	1			Northam
1940	1			Katanning
1948		278 fires		Not known
1949		527 fires		Many fires caused by locomotives of the Railways Department and private timber mills
1951		23 000	Forest trees	Dwellingup, Manjimup district, various parts of south-west corner
1960–1961		>1 500 000	132 houses, 2 service stations, 3 shops	Dwellingup (134 000ha), other areas
1974–1975		29 000 000		East and north-east of Kalgoorlie
2003		15 545 000		Cape Arid National Park, Ravensthorpe, Jurien Bay, Cervantes, Walpole Wilderness area, Mt Cooke, Kimberley and Desert Region

Sources:

- ACT Bush Fire Council 1952, Annual Report 1951–52 and various Council fire reports, <[www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1952fire.html](http://www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1952fire.html)>.
- ACT Bush Fire Council 1980, *Annual Report 1979–80*, viewed <[www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1979fire.html](http://www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1979fire.html)>.
- ACT Bush Fire Council 1984, *Annual Report 1983–84*, viewed <[www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1983fire.html](http://www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1983fire.html)>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995, 'Bushfires—an integral part of Australia's environment', *Year Book Australia*, <[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs)>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Australia Now*, <[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs)>.

- Bath, M & Deguara, J 2002, 'Australian bushfire history', <[australiasevereweather.com/fires/history.htm](http://australiasevereweather.com/fires/history.htm)>.
- *Canberra Times*, December 2001, <[www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/Xmas\\_2001\\_article.html](http://www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/Xmas_2001_article.html)>.
- *Canberra Times*, January 1939, <[www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1939fire.html](http://www.esb.act.gov.au/firebreak/1939fire.html)>.
- Department of Bush Fire Services 1994, *New South Wales Burning*, DBFS, Sydney.
- Department of Bush Fire Services 2002, *Bushfire Bulletin: Christmas fires 2001*, DBFS, Sydney.
- Hickman, J & Tarrant, M 1986, 'Australian bushfires and their real cost', Paper presented at Fire Science 1986, Fourth Australian National Biennial Conference of the Institution of Fire Engineers, Perth, 21–24 October.
- Leonard, JE & McArthur, NA 1999, 'A history of research into building performance in Australian bushfires', *Proceedings of the Australian Bushfire Conference*, Albury, July.
- Luke, RH & McArthur, AG 1978, *Bushfires in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- National Association of Forest Industries, <[www.nafi.com.au](http://www.nafi.com.au)>.
- New South Wales Fire Brigade, *Disasters*, <[www.nswfb.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nswfb.nsw.gov.au)>.
- New South Wales Government submission.
- NSW Forestry Commission annual reports from 1951 to 1990.
- NSW Rural Fire Service 2003, 'Brief History of Bushfires in NSW', viewed 9 February 2004, <[www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)>.
- School of Resources, Environment and Society, Australian National University 1995, <[sres.anu.edu.au](http://sres.anu.edu.au)>.