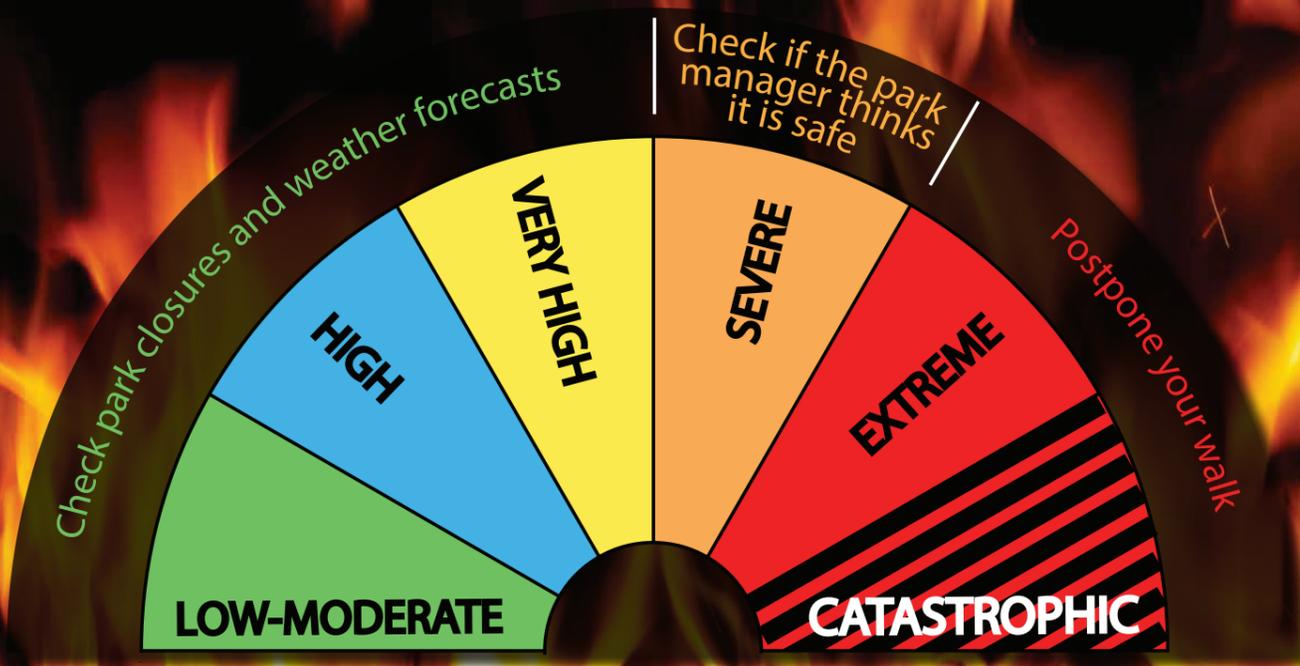


SHOULD I POSTPONE MY WALK?

Matt McClelland

Too hot to walk?



Before starting your walk always check!

Fire Information rfs.nsw.gov.au Weather Forecasts bom.gov.au Park Closures npws.nsw.gov.au

The safest option is to postpone your walk when;

- there is a Total Fire Ban, or
- the Fire Danger Rating is Severe or greater



A bushfire is the stuff of nightmares. I doubt I could imagine anything more terrifying than having a bushfire bearing down on me on a hot and windy day. On such a day the fire front can throw hot embers many kilometres from the main fire, starting new fires and causing the fire to spread rapidly. The radiant heat from many fires is so intense that even 100 metres away it can cause serious burns to your skin. There is no jumping in a creek or wombat hole to avoid this fire. The only way to be ensuring your survival is to be somewhere else. And then, on a day only halfway up the Fire Danger Rating scale, it can get very ugly out there.

It is a day where open fires are banned by the RFS Commissioner. The ban is put in place to limit the number of fires that escape and threaten life, property and the environment, especially on days when it is very hot, dry and windy. This means that it is illegal to use portable camping stoves on a bushwalk, including inside a tent.

Fire danger ratings and Total Fire Bans are usually announced at about 5 pm the day before they come into effect. Some park managers will close track and trails during Total Fire Bans. Park managers may not put closure information on their website until several hours after the announcement, if at all. Bushwalkers need to be proactive about safety and obtain information needed for a decision, and not leave it to chance.

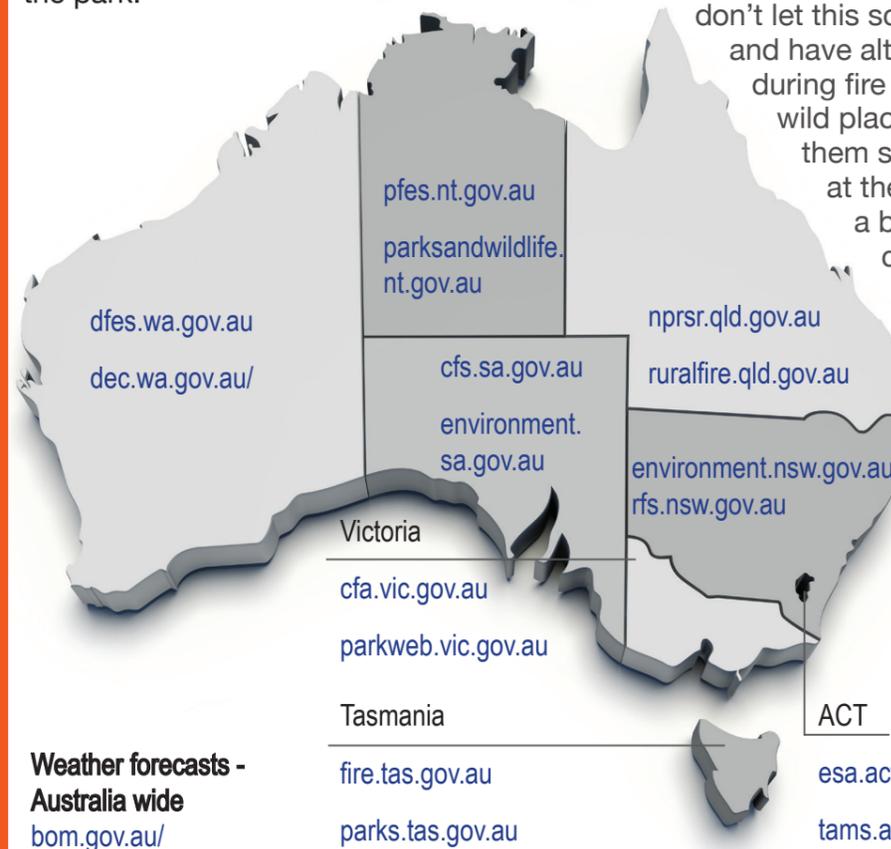
It is safest to cancel your walk on days of total fire ban as well as on severe, extreme or catastrophic fire danger rating. If you think it still safe to continue then contact park management to see what they say. They may think that the conditions are such that the planned walk is still safe to go ahead. Fire Danger Rating regions cover a large area, therefore due to local conditions some sections may have a lower risk than conditions, fuel loads and other activities in the park.

On days of Extreme or Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings the weather conditions will be uncomfortable and the risk from fire will be very significant. Postpone your walk even if the park remains open - it is just not worth the risk.

On longer multiday trips this obviously becomes more challenging. Carry non-cook meals and water purification systems that do not require a stove. Always register your walking plan with local Police or National Parks office. If there is a significant risk of fire during your walk and it is possible to leave the walk early, then this is the safest option. If leaving a bushfire-prone area is not possible then ensure you consider the safest areas for retreat and possible shelter from radiant heat. Stay alert to weather conditions and keep an eye out for any sign of fire. Check the local fire website if in mobile phone range or monitor local ABC radio stations for emergency broadcasts.

Phone for help or use your PLB if there is a threat of grave and imminent danger. Do not presume that rescue can make it in time. Rescue is challenging in high winds and when resources are stretched.

If you are in doubt play it safe: there are another 51 weekends in the year. Equally, don't let this scare you off - pick the days and have alternative activities planned during fire seasons. By their nature, wild places present risks, so take them seriously but still enjoy them at the right times. I often have a backup trip plan, so if the conditions are not safe then I have an easy option two.



Weather forecasts - Australia wide bom.gov.au/

This article is a summary of one published in our emag BWA201312.

