



## **Briefing paper – Environment Committee (Beginners)**

***Topic: The issue of humanitarian aid and support for the current Australian wildfires.***

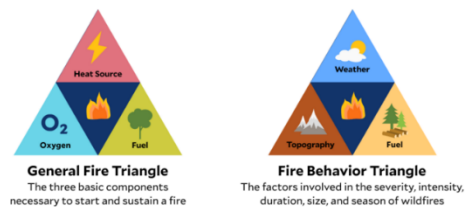
### Overview

The devastating wildfires that have swept across Australia in recent years have not only posed significant environmental challenges but have also triggered a pressing humanitarian crisis. The wildfires have caused widespread destruction, loss of life, displacement of people, and significant damage to the country's ecosystems.

### Cause and acceleration of Wildfires

National Geographic describes wildfires as “an uncontrolled fire that burns in the wildland vegetation, often in rural areas”. Wildfires can burn in forests, grasslands savannas and other ecosystems and have been doing so for millions of years. They aren't limited to a particular continent or environment.

To begin, there needs to be presence of all 3 elements of the fire triangle – heat, oxygen, and fuel. They are typically started by humans, through barbeques, campfires, cigarettes, or glass bottles (they magnify the sun). If they are to start naturally, it is through lightning strikes. Wildfires usually occur after long periods of hot dry weather as well as having a lack of rain. They can be accelerated by the relief of the land – a slope of  $10^\circ$  will double the rate at which the fire spreads due to the fire drying out fuels further up the slope, allowing them to ignite more quickly.



Ground fires typically ignite in soil thick with organic matter which feeds the flames. These types of fires can smoulder for a long time until conditions are right for them to grow to a surface or crown fire. Surface fires burn above the ground in dry and dead vegetation such as parched grass or fallen leaves. Crown fires burn in the leaves and canopies of trees and shrubs.

## Australian Bushfires

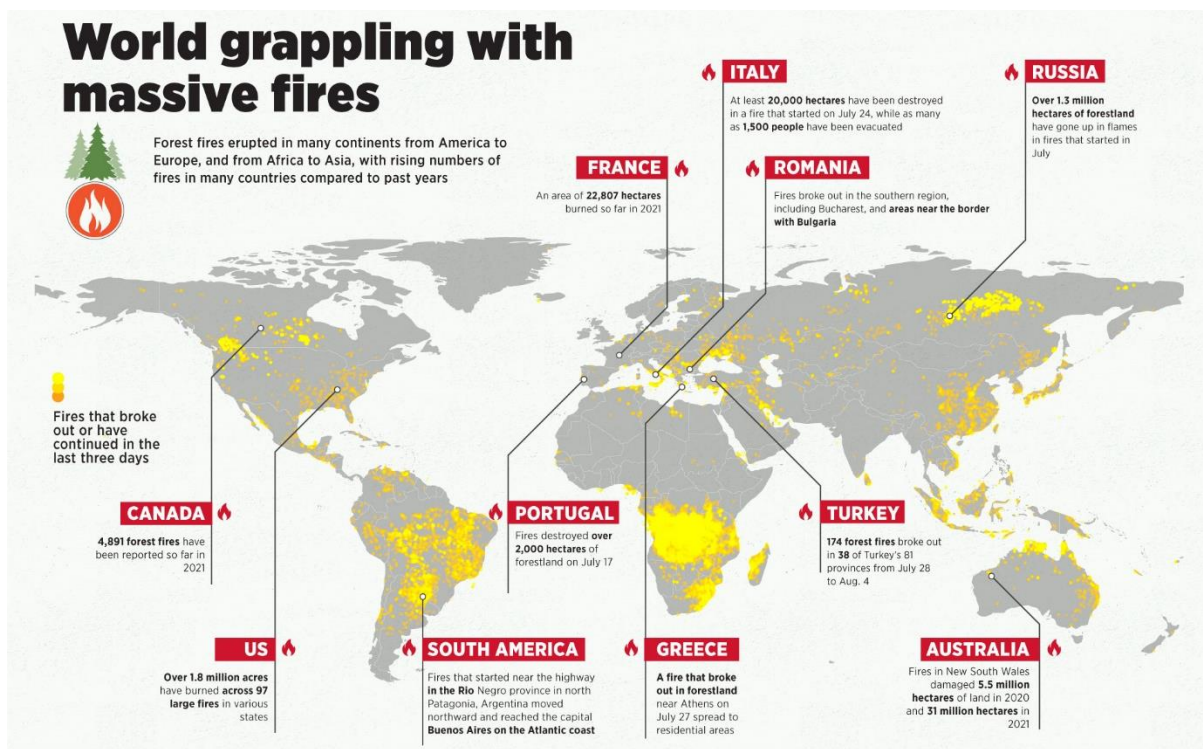
The Australian summer runs from December through to February and often sees abnormally high temperatures, very little water as well as wildfires being a common occurrence. These wildfires have become increasingly severe, exacerbated by climate change.

During the 2019/20 bushfire season:

- 28 people were killed
- 2000 homes were lost
- An estimated 1 billion animals were lost
- 1/3 of the entire koala population perished

The impact on endangered species has long term ecological consequences, and the displaced population faces many immediate and long term impacts and humanitarian needs, including shelter, food, clean water, medical assistance, and psychological support.

Later down the line, communities will need to be reconstructed as well and infrastructure and livelihoods to be restored. Major investments will need to be made, in the hope to 'build back better' in the hope that during the next natural disaster, economic and social losses will be significantly lower. A long term goal would be to significantly reduce the frequency of wildfires, which would create the need to invest into various mitigation measures.



### Points to consider:

What is the current situation with wildfires in your country?

What is your country's stance on global warming?

Is there anything citizens can do to tackle the problem of wildfires?

Should an effort be made to protect and save all animals/plants?

Should common causes and triggers of wildfires be limited globally?

What cultural factors in your country make wildfires more or less likely? E.g. number of smokers, popularity of outdoors activities leading to campfires and barbecues

Are wildfires likely to be close to large centres of population, making them a more significant threat?

### Useful websites and links

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/wildfires?gclid=CjwKCAjw4P6oBhBsEiwAKYVvkq1yjNNw-9QZZDfW7dHKdaTYc1FDMq-1Ac0ndMXIEKdx5kNu4L6ugkhoCnT4QAvD BwE#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/wildfires?gclid=CjwKCAjw4P6oBhBsEiwAKYVvkq1yjNNw-9QZZDfW7dHKdaTYc1FDMq-1Ac0ndMXIEKdx5kNu4L6ugkhoCnT4QAvD BwE#tab=tab_1)

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/how-countries-can-tackle-devastating-peatland-wildfires>

<https://news.un.org/en/tags/wildfires>

<https://www.un-redd.org/fire-management>

<https://www.edf.org/climate/heres-how-climate-change-affects-wildfires>