

# MOVING BEYOND THE BLAME GAME: SHARING RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY

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## Background

Conflicting ideas about who is responsible for managing bushfire risk are not new in Australia. The ‘Prepare, Leave Early or Stay and Defend’ approach is based on the premise that individuals, households and communities should accept primary responsibility for their own fire safety. However, in practice many people see the State and fire agencies as ultimately responsible. This expectation was once again brought into stark relief following the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria in February 2009. Many people directed blame at the State and/or fire agencies for the devastating outcomes of those fires.

In light of this situation, the final report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission has recognized the need to explicitly share responsibility for managing bushfire risk more constructively. A chapter of the report is dedicated to the principle of Shared Responsibility, which underpins all of the Commission’s recommendations.

## Research Needs

In order to pursue Shared Responsibility in practice, we need to better understand current and future barriers, opportunities and alternatives. A complex and interacting array of factors influences how we might share bushfire risk and responsibility in the Australian context. These include:

- vaguely defined responsibilities in law, policy and regulation
- growing, urbanizing and increasingly mobile populations
- divergent cultural values around how to live in a fire prone landscape
- diverse economic, social and political contexts for expectations, choices and constraints about where to live and how to prepare for bushfire.

Moving beyond the blame game to create the situation of Shared Responsibility that is envisioned in the Commission’s report requires us to better understand these influences and to consider alternative ways to address them.

## The Project

The two goals of this project are to:

1. increase our understanding of factors that influence risk- and responsibility-sharing in fire and emergency management in Australia
2. identify and explore policy alternatives to share bushfire risk and responsibility.

The project, which began in August 2010, will take place over three years in four stages:

	Objectives
<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Review ways that risk and responsibility sharing issues are conceptualized in risk research</b>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Identify risk- and responsibility-sharing issues encountered in a range of policy sectors internationally, &amp; the policy responses</b>
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Investigate issues of risk- and responsibility-sharing encountered in Australian fire and emergency management</b>
<b>Stage 4</b>	<b>Identify and evaluate policy alternatives to share bushfire risk and responsibility in Australia in the context of what we learn through Stages 1-3</b>

The research methodology is currently in development. It will include a review of relevant literature, content analysis of relevant documents and media, workshops, and the preparation of illustrative case studies.

Key outcomes will include journal publications, presentations and workshops at CRC forums, and reports for agencies and other CRC stakeholders.

This research will assist policy makers and agency managers to decide on strategies to advance Shared Responsibility.

