SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND
Roadside Burning Project

Project Background and Stakeholder Consultation
In 2011, in response to community concern and lack of an identified process, SEQ Catchments1, considered a proposed policy paper on the issue of fuel load management on roadside reserves (Dale, 2011). Specifically, the paper dealt with the issue of private landholders wishing to burn council or state managed roadsides (adjoining their properties), for hazard reduction purposes.

In recognizing that this was a critical community, fire and biodiversity issue, SEQ Catchments asked the SEQ Fire and Biodiversity Consortium to manage the project. The objectives of the project are to:
(1) Engage with land manager stakeholders to identify the main issues and any existing procedures; and
(2) Outline existing procedures, how they may be utilised and encourage adoption.

NB: Any proposed procedures must align with Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFES) ‘Permit to Light Fire’ system.

Two major stakeholder consultation workshops were undertaken:
(1) A land manager workshop, organized by the SEQ Fire and Biodiversity Consortium. It was agreed that the four key issues facing land managers are: (1) biodiversity values; (2) responsibility and funding; (3) insurance; and (4) local laws. This workshop featured a successful program underway at South Burnett Regional Council, called the South Burnett Model.

(2) A road corridor management workshop, organized by the Upper Brisbane Region Catchment Network (UBRCN). This workshop identified that a successful coordinated agency approach existed in the Toowoomba Regional Council area, the Coordinated Agency Model. The Coordinated Agency Model addresses the issue of biodiversity by including QPWS in the assessment phase. It also deals with insurance concerns by having QPWS staff and volunteers conduct burns (see below).

This process has only been operating at its present level since September 2011, but in this short time has demonstrated enormous success. In theory, it can be applied to all local government areas across SEQ, provided key staff can be identified and there is a willingness to work together. It provides an excellent opportunity for local governments to achieve efficient and safe roadside corridor hazard reduction burns, whilst maintaining community trust and biodiversity values.

The South Burnett Model
The process underway at South Burnett Regional Council (RC) requires landholders to complete an application form, council assess the application and dependent upon various restrictions (e.g. biodiversity values described below) may grant permission, with a set of strict conditions. The landholder must obtain a valid ‘Permit to Light Fire’ from the QFES for their land and South Burnett RC obtain one for the roadside verge. As part of this process, landholders are covered by council insurance. South Burnett RC used various mapping resources (e.g. Regional Ecosystem mapping) and ecological burning guidelines to identify areas of potential high combustion value. This process identified six nationally and state listed species and communities in their region. Council then commissioned a study to map these species and communities and they also assessed all roads with a medium to very high fire risk. This information was used to develop a list of roads that do not contain high biodiversity values. These areas have a preapproval for fuel load reduction burning for 12 months. All other roads are deemed to contain a high biodiversity value and require assessment by Council.

The Coordinated Agency Model Flow Chart: Summary of Process

Application

Private landholders contact their Rural Fire Brigade & request roadside burn.

Rural Fire Brigade request permission to conduct a burn (via regional/brigade priorities or landholder).

QPWS issue a ‘Permit to Light Fire’, allowing a burn to be conducted.

Assessment

QPWS assess the Plan for biodiversity priorities (e.g. threatened species & Indigenous Ecological Communities).

DTAR assess the Plan for road safety/traffic control issues & provide a Traffic Management Plan if needed.

QPWS assess requests & prepare a Fire Management Plan the Plan. The Plan is sent to QPWS (biodiversity assessment) & to DTMR (assessment of road safety/traffic control issues).

Enabling Process

DTMR issue an annual permit to QPWS to undertake burning operations within their corridor.

Regional roadside priorities help determine roadside burning works via RDLAC.

Toowoomba RC issues an annual permit to QPWS to “Infringement works within the road reserve”.

Where to from here?
The SEQ Fire and Biodiversity Consortium have provided the project report to all local governments, relevant state agencies, Powerlink Queensland and the SEQ Catchments Members Association and are currently liaising with interested councils. The report will also be promoted through various other networks (e.g. Fire Management Groups). It is hoped that this project will encourage land managers to assess their situation and make informed decisions regarding roadside burning. Interested land managers are encouraged to contact the SEQ Fire and Biodiversity Consortium.

1 SEQ Catchments is the natural resource management body for South East Queensland.