

Written submission: EFRA Wildfire Call for Evidence

Introduction

1. This submission has been prepared by Defra, with support from MHCLG, which is the lead government department for wildfire.
2. It should be read alongside evidence provided by Defra's agencies and arm's-length bodies, such as the Forestry Commission and Natural England, which sets out their operational expertise, supporting analysis and delivery of measures on the ground.
3. It highlights the Government's recognition of the growing risk of wildfire in England and the coordinated, targeted action being taken through policy, funding and land management interventions to mitigate that risk and build preparedness, resilience and recovery.
4. Where questions asked by the Committee fall outside the remit of government, or relate to delivery by agencies, sector specialists, Fire and Rescue Services, land managers or other stakeholders, they have not been addressed in detail.

Strengthening cross-government coordination, roles and responsibilities on wildfire

5. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is the lead government department for wildfire response (since 1 April 2025) and owns the National Risk Register (NRR) wildfire risk. However, a coordinated cross-government approach is essential to mitigate the impact of wildfire on people, property, habitats, livestock, natural capital and wildlife, and to provide the most effective response to incidents.
6. This is why Defra is strengthening its resource on wildfire, in support of an improved cross-government wildfire governance and delivery structure, co-chaired by both departments. This is starting to provide a more coordinated approach across the full wildfire risk cycle - from risk anticipation and assessment through to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery and adaptation to a changing climate across land management, environmental protection, public health and safety and emergency response.
7. The new arrangements will provide clear leadership, agreed roles and reporting lines, and stronger routes for collaboration across government and with key partners through task-and-finish work focused on priority issues - risk anticipation, response, prevention, resilience, preparedness and recovery.
8. This work sits within the Government's wider approach to climate adaptation. The Climate Change Committee published its independent assessment of the climate risks facing the UK on 20 May 2026. This will inform the next Climate Change Risk Assessment, due in January 2027, and the Government's response through the fourth National Adaptation Programme, due in 2028.

Growing wildfire risk and socio-economic impacts on agricultural land and at the rural–urban interface

9. The Fourth UK Climate Change Risk Assessment Independent Assessment (CCRA4-IA) estimates that the number of days with weather conditions conducive to wildfire could double at 2°C of global warming and increase by up to five times at 4°C, compared with 1850–1900.
10. Wildfire can have wide-ranging consequences for agricultural production, rural economies, infrastructure, landscapes and biodiversity, while also harming public health through poorer air and water quality and increasing risks to public safety.
11. Recent fire weather events near London in July 2022, on the North York Moors in August 2025 and at the Snake Pass summit in the Peak District in April this year, demonstrate the scale and breadth of what can happen when wildfires occur. Upland moorlands, peatlands, protected landscapes and nature reserves are all at risk, as well as the rural–urban interface, where communities and infrastructure are directly exposed and where incidents can be especially complex and resource-intensive to prevent, manage and recover from.

How can land management techniques be best used at a regional level to prevent and control wildfires whilst balancing the needs of different land users?

12. Land management is most effective when planned and delivered at landscape scale, reflecting the fact that wildfire risk crosses administrative boundaries, land uses and ownership patterns, and often involves multiple local authorities and Fire and Rescue Services. A regional approach helps ensure that measures such as wildfire planning, fire and fuel breaks, fire belts, habitat management and strategic access operate as connected interventions across whole landscapes, rather than isolated sites.
13. This is particularly important in higher-risk areas, where coordinated action on wildfire management planning, restoration measures and fuel and habitat management can help restore hydrology, create habitat mosaics and improve resilience while balancing wider objectives for nature recovery, climate adaptation and sustainable land use.
14. Defra's Landscape Recovery Scheme is an Environmental Land Management scheme that supports large-scale, long-term projects across whole landscapes. It enables groups of land managers to work together through bespoke agreements to restore habitats and deliver environmental outcomes, including peatland recovery. Improved resilience to wildfire is likely to be one of many benefits delivered through such projects.
15. Upper Duddon Landscape Recovery Project is one example of this approach. In July 2025, it entered a 20-year agreement with Natural England, securing long-term funding for a project that brings together farmers, environmental organisations and the local community to restore habitats across the valley, increasing long-term resilience to threats including wildfire.
16. Defra is also supporting nature recovery and increasing landscape resilience to wildfire through specific funding of peatland restoration. Measures such as rewetting cannot

prevent ignition, but they can reduce fire severity and help mitigate the impacts of wildfires when they occur.

17. There are many examples of increased wildfire resilience due to peatland restoration across the country, including at The Roaches and through the RSPB / Moors for the Future Partnership at Dove Stone in the Peak District, on behalf of landowner United Utilities. Further case study examples of where rewetting has mitigated the impacts of wildfire, can be found in Natural England's response to EFRA's call for evidence.

What role do nature-based solutions, such as improving biodiversity and more resilient landscapes, have in the prevention and control of wildfires?

18. Defra funds peatland restoration through public grants, most notably the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme (NCPGS), which has been extended to 2027, and through land management payments to farmers. Since its launch in 2020, the NCPGS has committed around £53 million, supporting the restoration of approximately 28,000 hectares of peatland.
19. As part of the wider landscape-scale approach, these investments support nature-based interventions that can strengthen wildfire resilience by restoring ecosystem function and creating more heterogeneous landscapes. Peatland restoration, hydrological recovery and habitat mosaics can increase soil and vegetation moisture, reduce fuel loads and continuity, and limit the dominance of highly flammable vegetation, such as heather and *Molinia*.
20. These changes can also moderate fire behaviour by slowing rates of spread and reducing intensity, creating safer and more effective conditions for fire and rescue services to contain and control incidents.
21. The Government recognises that nature-based solutions are not sufficient in isolation and must be implemented alongside fuel and habitat management, preparedness, access, response and public engagement. However, they remain an important part of wildfire resilience, reducing the likelihood of severe or sustained wildfire while also delivering wider benefits for biodiversity, carbon storage, water regulation, and the condition and recovery of the habitats and landscapes they are intended to protect.
22. There is an established scientific consensus that burning vegetation on peatlands is damaging. Healthy blanket bogs provide important environmental benefits, including biodiversity, carbon storage, flood mitigation and improved water quality, and are also more resilient to wildfire. Protecting these habitats from further harm, alongside restoring and rewetting degraded peatlands, is therefore an important part of wildfire resilience. Peatlands are also highly vulnerable to wildfire: fires can smoulder below ground for extended periods, as seen at sites such as Fylingdales, causing long-term damage and carbon loss. Once ignited, wildfires or escaped burns present a significant and often irreversible risk to these sensitive and irreplaceable habitats.
23. In September 2025, the Government amended the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021 to further restrict routine burning on upland peat deeper than 30cm, except where a licence has been granted. Licences may be granted where other measures cannot adequately reduce the potential impact of wildfire. The Regulations align

with wider climate and biodiversity goals and increase the area protected from burning, except under licence, from 246,156 hectares to over 676,000 hectares.

24. By ensuring that any burning is subject to clear safeguards and justification, the Regulations support more resilient peatland habitats and a longer-term approach to wildfire resilience while also delivering wider benefits for climate mitigation and biodiversity.

How best can Defra funding schemes be used to support land managers to adapt to the increased risk of wildfires?

25. Defra funding schemes will continue to support landscape-scale action to help land managers adapt to increasing wildfire risk. This includes practical measures to reduce fire spread and severity, improve access and preparedness for firefighting, and strengthen resilience while also supporting nature and climate objectives.
26. In addition to the Landscape Recovery approach detailed in the earlier section, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier includes options that support wildfire resilience, including for wildfire planning, for fire and fuel breaks, and for fire belts. Scheme design supports maintenance, planning and collaboration across holdings in higher-risk landscapes, so that measures operate as connected networks rather than isolated interventions.
27. Defra has also funded the development of four Vegetation Fire courses, delivered by the Forestry Commission and accredited by Lantra. Nearly 2,000 modules have been delivered to date, including practical training on controlled and uncontrolled vegetation fires and the development of Wildfire Management Plans.
28. The courses equip land managers and practitioners with a standardised, competency-based approach to understanding, safely operating at, and managing vegetation fires (both wildfires and prescribed burns), providing the knowledge, practical skills, and safety protocols needed to prevent, respond to, and manage fire incidents.
29. Defra funding also embeds proportionate wildfire risk assessment and mitigation within routine land management activity, including through existing plans and consents such as woodland management planning. This helps ensure that wildfire risk is considered systematically in decisions on access, operations, habitat management and resilience.
30. Peatland restoration also supports adaptation by restoring degraded peatlands to wet, functioning peat bogs and, where appropriate, maintaining strategic fire-control features while hydrological recovery is underway. Used in this way, Defra schemes, such as NCPGS, support adaptation not only through site-level interventions, but by enabling more coherent and resilient management across whole landscapes.

What evidence-gaps are there and how can they be filled?

31. To support and refine those delivery approaches in practice, Defra and its ALBs continue to invest in and review emerging research and evidence to inform government policy and practice. Current priorities include strengthening the evidence base on the drivers of wildfire risk, the full costs of wildfire, and how best to support prevention, response and recovery.
32. As part of the third National Adaptation Programme, Defra has commissioned research on wildfire risk in peatlands. This includes economic modelling of the full costs of peatland wildfires, the feasibility of a dynamic peat wildfire risk map, options for faster reporting of peat fire incidents, and the recovery of peat habitats after wildfire.

33. This work intends to fill important evidence gaps by improving quantification of wildfire impacts and strengthening understanding of where risk is greatest, how incidents develop, and what information is most useful for policy, operational response and recovery planning.
34. International evidence and practice are valuable, but they cannot always be applied directly to England because of differences in climate, topography, land use, land ownership and habitat composition. The most useful international lessons are therefore likely to relate to approach and capability, including integrated risk assessment, stronger use of mapping and data, and clearer links between prevention, response and recovery.
35. The Government is also learning from recent experience in England, including the extensive wildfire on Langdale Moor in North Yorkshire in summer 2025. That incident challenged assumptions about firebreaks and control measures and highlighted the need for stronger coordination from the immediate response through to longer-term recovery. It also identified opportunities to make more effective use of mapping and shared information, including on water access, peat extent and operational constraints, to support both incident management and recovery planning.

What impact does the monitoring of wildfires have on our understanding of the causes and risks of these events in the UK, and how can this be improved? Are there international examples or best practices that can be used in a UK context?

36. Monitoring and recording wildfires is essential to improving understanding of ignition causes, identifying hotspots, targeting preventative action, and strengthening preparedness and response.
37. In England, incident data is collected nationally from Fire and Rescue Services through the Fire and Rescue Data Platform (FaRDaP), which is being reviewed to ensure that wildfire-relevant information is captured more consistently and effectively. Most wildfires are linked to human activity, including deliberate fire-setting, careless use of barbecues or campfires, escaped managed burns and equipment faults. This underlines the importance of robust incident recording to understand causes and inform targeted prevention.
38. Monitoring will be improved through more consistent and complete incident data and stronger integration with environmental indicators and forecasting. Tools such as the Met Office Fire Severity Index and Daily Hazard Assessment already support risk monitoring, situational awareness and readiness at national and local levels. Delivering a more integrated approach will require sustained collaboration across departments and agencies, including the Met Office.
39. International best practice points to more integrated wildfire risk assessment, bringing together incident records with weather, vegetation and exposure data. The Government is also engaging closely with the international community through the UN Food and Agriculture Global Fire Management Hub, which has a specific focus on fire data.

What resources and training do emergency services and local authorities need to respond to the increasing number of wildfires, particularly in rural and hard to-reach areas?

40. Fire and Rescue Services have the primary operational role in responding to wildfires, and MHCLG leads on fire policy and resilience.
41. Fire and Rescue Authorities are required to plan for foreseeable risks in their area, including wildfire, through their Community Risk Management Plans, having regard to the views of other key local responders. Most incidents are managed through local resilience arrangements, and capabilities are shaped by local risk profiles.
42. Since 2024, the Government has funded a National Resilience Wildfire Advisor to assess what additional national wildfire capabilities may be needed to strengthen resilience to wildfire risk and improve coordination across the sector.
43. Recent wildfire events have highlighted the increasing demand and importance of appropriate specialist equipment and training, particularly for incidents in rural and hard-to-reach areas, as well as interoperability between Fire and Rescue Services through mutual aid arrangements.
44. Effective response also depends on strong coordination between Fire and Rescue Services, local authorities, other responders and local actors, including land managers. Local Resilience Forums provide the mechanism for multi-agency planning and coordination, supporting preparedness and response at local level.
45. Lessons identified from recent incidents continue to inform improvements to planning, training and coordination. MHCLG's Stronger LRF Trailblazer programme is supporting five local areas to strengthen strategic resilience leadership, democratic accountability and the integration of risk into mainstream local policy, generating learning that can be scaled nationally for hazards such as wildfires.

What are the most effective activities for tackling the human causes of wildfire ignition, for example public engagement and campaigns? How can the UK Government best support the delivery of these activities at both a local and national scale?

46. Behaviour change at scale is complex and is likely to require a combination of national communications, locally tailored engagement, and enforcement activity where appropriate, informed by local risk profiles and patterns of use. Improved monitoring, and the effective use of digital mapping combined with climate and land data, can strengthen the targeting of engagement and prevention activity while strong local resilience arrangements and clear cross-government coordination support more consistent delivery across England.
47. Engagement supports prevention and preparedness by reducing human-caused ignitions through targeted communication and locally relevant prevention activity.
48. At national level, measures include government social media messaging during high-risk periods and the inclusion of wildfire within wider Cabinet Office resilience communications.

The 'Fire Kills' campaign has also provided toolkits that Fire and Rescue Services can use to support locally delivered prevention activity.

49. In England, local authorities have powers to restrict disposable barbecues in parks and public spaces through byelaws, and some, including Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, have done so. Existing powers can also be used to prohibit fires on access land in National Landscapes and National Parks, as in the New Forest and Peak District. The government encourages local authorities to use these powers where appropriate, including through Public Spaces Protection Orders under section 59 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

Conclusion

50. The government is taking a clear and increasingly joined-up approach to building wildfire resilience in England. Through stronger cross-government coordination, a developing Wildfire Action Plan, landscape-scale land management, nature-based solutions, targeted funding, improved monitoring and risk assessment, and support for local prevention and preparedness, the government is putting important foundations in place to address current and future wildfire risk in a proportionate and evidence-led way. Defra and its arms-length bodies are continuing to strengthen the evidence base to support better-targeted and more effective action, aligned with wider environmental objectives and statutory commitments.
51. As climate risks increase, this provides a strong basis for further progress over time, supporting communities, protecting nature, improving preparedness and helping to create more resilient landscapes across England.
52. Where wildfires do occur, government continues to work with responders and land managers to support effective response and recovery including learning lessons to improve future prevention and preparedness.

May 2026