



Parks and Wildlife Service's fire operations officer Kent McConnell explains the new fuel reduction program.

Fuel reduction target 'reckless' says chairman

By PATRICK BILLINGS

THE state's top fire manager says burning off 60,000 hectares in the first years of a new \$28.5 million fuel reduction program would be "reckless".

The state government had taken the 60,000 ha – or five per cent of treatable land – a year target to the election, but the figure is now treated as aspirational if mentioned at all.

State Fire Management Council chairman Ian Sauer officially launched the four-year program yesterday.

Mr Sauer said the program was less about arbitrary

targets than strategically limiting fire damage.

"My personal view is it would be financially and environmentally reckless in the first year and even the first couple of years [to burn 60,000ha]," he said.

"But certainly after that the target is there."

Mr Sauer said Victoria, which had a five per cent target, was considering revising the figure and was watching Tasmania's approach with interest.

He said that five-year hypothetical modelling showed a 2.5 per cent target was almost as useful as anything beyond that.

Last year the council recommended to the government a minimum of 31,000 hectares a year to be measured on a five-year rolling average.

"Burning a least 31,000 ha of all treatable vegetation each year... was both financially and operationally achievable," the council's Bushfire in Tasmania report said.

Mr Sauer said people would notice more smoke with warnings to be provided through the Asthma Foundation of Tasmania's online smoke alert.

"There's going to be more

smoke there's no doubt about it," he said.

"However the total amount of smoke will be less than if there was huge bushfires."

He said information sessions would be held in communities.

As reported in *The Examiner* in September, the new approach is "tenure blind" meaning it encompassed public and private land and is at the cutting edge of bushfire mitigation in Australia.

It is also unique in the amount of information sharing among the Tasmania Fire Service, the Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Tasmania – agencies that will conducting the reductions.