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26 – 28 AUGUST 2025
Perth, Western Australia

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From Little (Local) Things, Big Things Grow

A Whole-of-Town Approach to Bushfire and Emergency Preparedness

Denmark (WA) Bushfire Ready Team

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Australian Government
National Emergency
Management Agency



Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience



A Help
Company



Our Context: Denmark WA

- High bushfire risk area; mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers (+ heating/drying climate)
- Dense eucalypt forests and coastal heath
- Growing population with many new residents unfamiliar with bushfire risks
- High proportion of residents are environmentally invested
- Urban, Rural/Urban Fringe (small landholdings) and larger agricultural properties
- Zero long term rental accommodation vacancies; a lot of short-stay holiday rentals (AirBnB) and non-resident holiday homes
- Population swells by 15,000+ from December to March ("tourist season") – aligning with hottest, driest season.
- A shire keen to support bushfire preparation (financial and physical)



DWELLINGS = 3643

FIRE APPLIANCES = 16



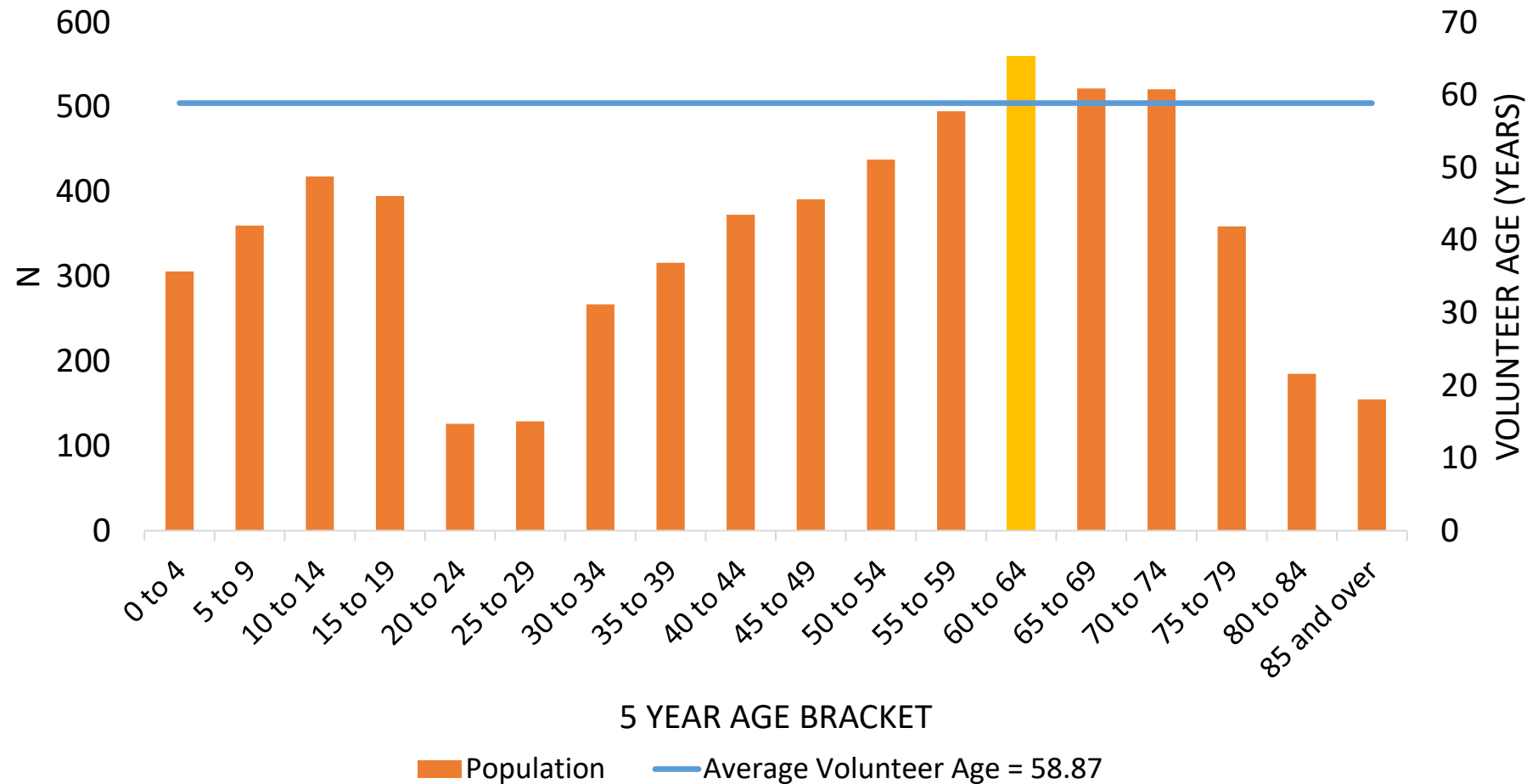
Our Context: Denmark WA

- Several large, dense housing developments with only one or two access routes in and out
- Iconic and popular WA Tourism hotspot – nearly 200,000 visitors stay at least one night per year (2024 data)
- Popular surf beach has only one access route; popular swimming beach (400,000 visitors per year) is at the end of a long, single access route through heavy coastal heath and peppermint forest
- Several mobile phone service black zones
- Large and rising numbers of illegal campers during peak tourist season





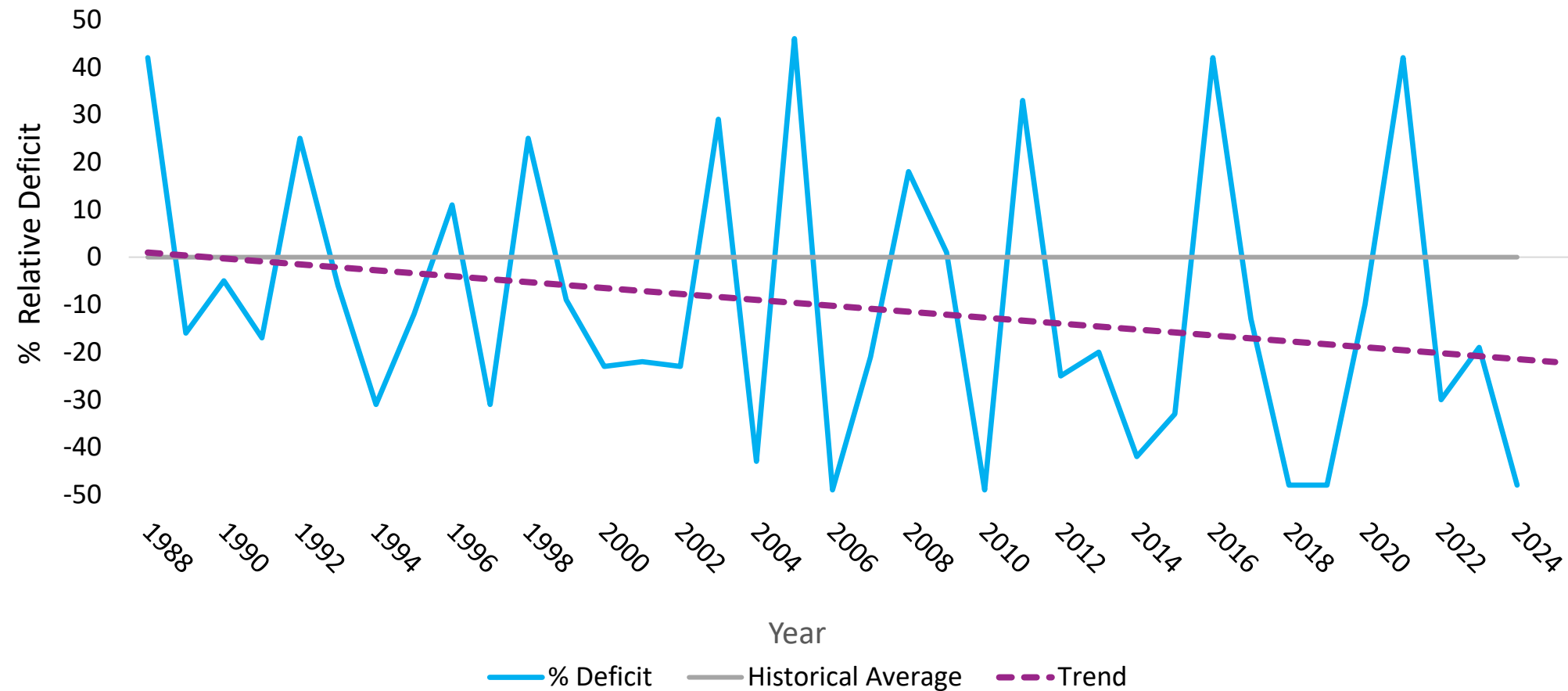
Denmark WA Age Profile (2021)



- From 2016 to 2021, the group that changed the most was 70 to 74 year olds, increasing by 138 people.



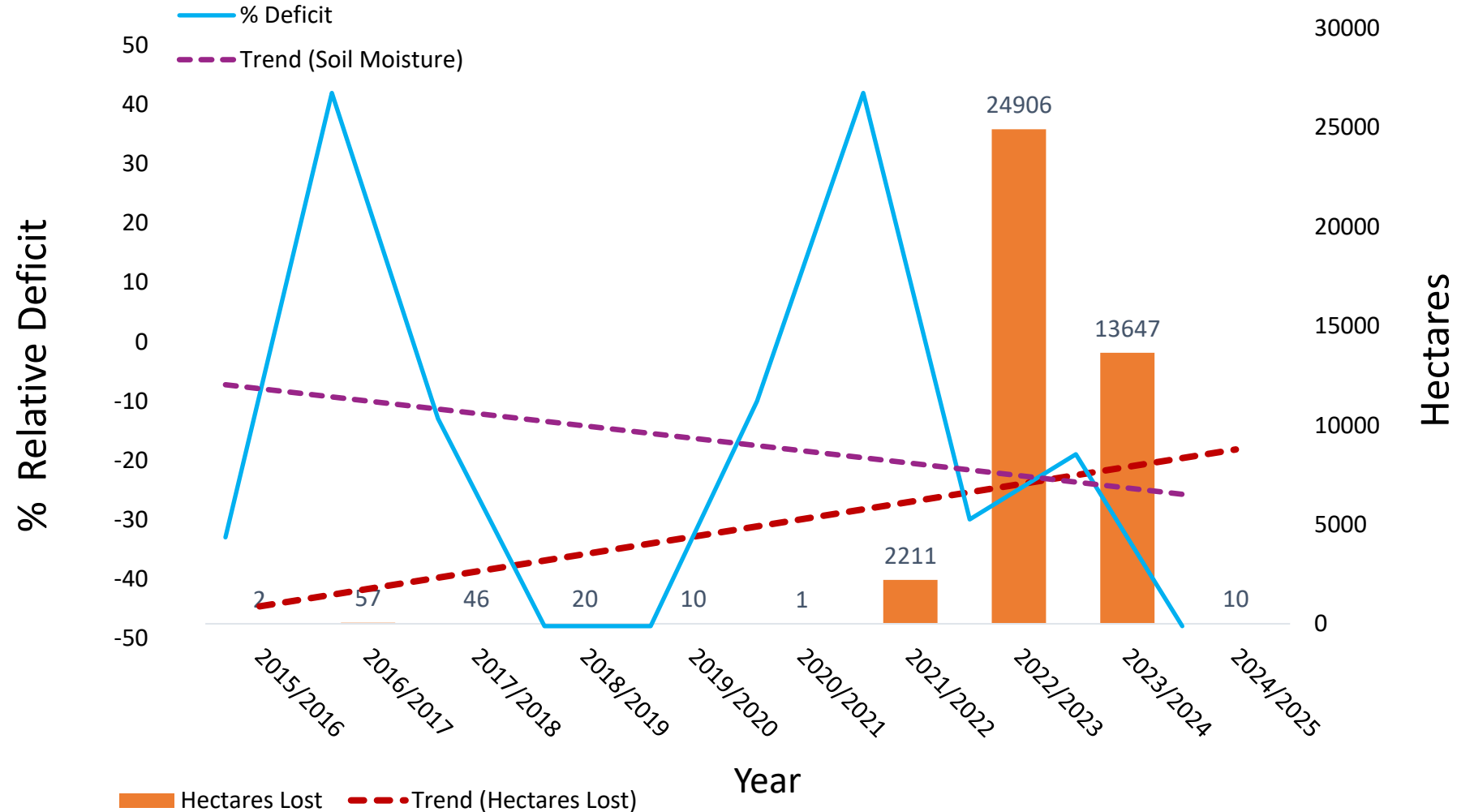
Soil Moisture (Root Zone) - Relative Deficit* Denmark Catchment



*Relative deficit compared to historical average



Hectares Lost to Fire vs Relative Soil Moisture Deficit - Shire of Denmark





Goals & Objectives

Our volunteer-driven, community-led model addresses three key goals in response to increasing climate-driven disaster risks:

- **Improving** individual property preparation, community awareness and safety practices
 - to reduce accidental bushfire ignitions and slow the spread of fires, easing strain on emergency resources and reducing housing loss in rural areas
 - to improve rates of planned, early and safe evacuation, reducing stress and trauma and preventing deaths
- **Embedding** a culture of disaster resilience across generations, focusing on children, families, and seniors
 - to build a foundation for future adaptation to climate change.
- **Reinvigorating** local emergency services volunteerism
 - to reverse the decline in volunteer workforces.





Our Event - 1st Weekend November

Why?

- One month before Prohibited Burning Period and commencement of property inspections
- Sunny weather has (usually) arrived, tourist numbers building rapidly
- Peak time for “last minute” property preparation (rapid grass growth)
- Before fire crews are likely to be busy with call-outs
- Weekend hours for maximum passer-by engagement (peak town shopping hours)





Friday Evening – Opening Events

- Sundowner followed by Feast not Fire Dinner
 - Welcome to the weekend of events, outline of the events
 - Celebration of volunteer fire fighters, long service medals, BFR awards (and sponsored prizes)
- Dinner useful for first couple of years
 - This became more of a celebration of vollies' contribution
 - Lots of work v limited benefit (in terms of BFR goals)
 - Stretched volunteers and brigade engagement over 3 days
 - 2025 event will not have Feast Not Fire dinner (but will retain opening Sundowner)





Saturday Fire Truck Trail – Flagship Event

- Brigade/service trucks and crews stationed around town, engaging with families, children collecting stamps from each truck for their own book (illustrated by well known local artist)
- Local radio outside broadcast





Saturday Fire Truck Trail – Key Strategies

- **INESCAPABLE** (whole of town CBD during peak weekend grocery hours)
- Bright, bold, **ENERGIZED** atmosphere
 - EVERY fire appliance (plus Marine Rescue, St John's Ambulance, SES, museum)
- **BEHAVIOURAL HOOKS** for sustained engagement – trail design with stamp booklet
 - Lead in promotions (“unashamed emotional blackmail”)
 - Volunteer with light tanker stationed at local primary schools at pick-up time, 2x per week, for two weeks prior to event
 - Inviting kids to invite their parents; advertising prizes for completed books
- Engagement **TRAINING** for crews – “stop everyone who walks past”
 - Focus on **COMMON VALUES**



Saturday PM - Workshops

- Intro and advanced interactive workshops
 - Shire firebreak/fuel management notice
 - Preparing your property for bushfires
 - Creating a bushfire emergency plan for you, your family, and your pets and livestock.
 - Retrofitting your property
 - Firewise landscaping and gardening
 - Bushfire Behaviour
- VR goggles (Interactive Bushfire Experience)





Sunday – Bushfire Brigade Games

- Brigade skills tests
- Activities for families and children
- Prizes for kids bringing Fire Truck Trail completed stamp booklets
- Bushfire Heritage Museum historical vehicles and display.





Brigade Games Strategies

- **LOCAL BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP** of prize hampers
- something from every business in town
- **BEHAVIOURAL HOOKS**
 - Kid's book prizes to bring families back again
 - Sausage sizzle (the great Aussie olfactory bribe)
- **VISIBILITY & PIGGYBACKING**
 - Positioned on High School Oval (on main highway)
 - Next to weekend markets (coffee vans, food vans)



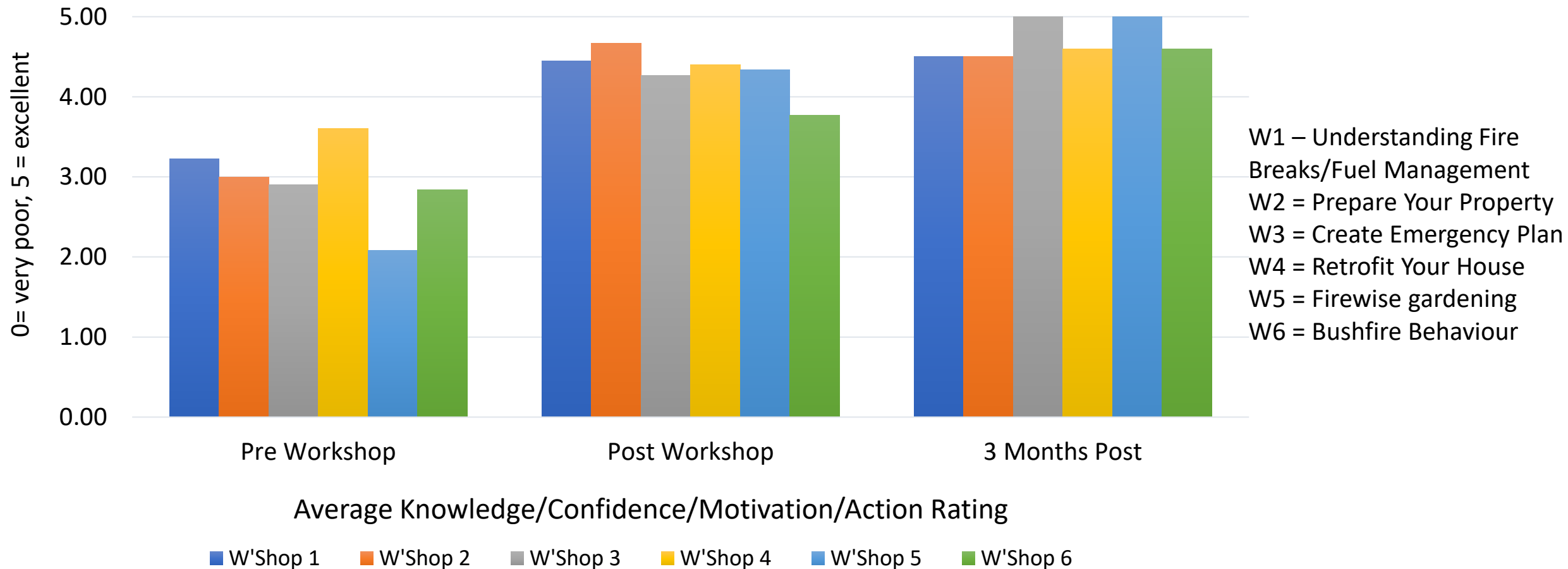


Outcomes...



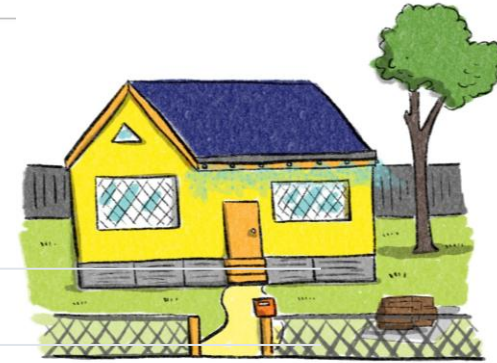
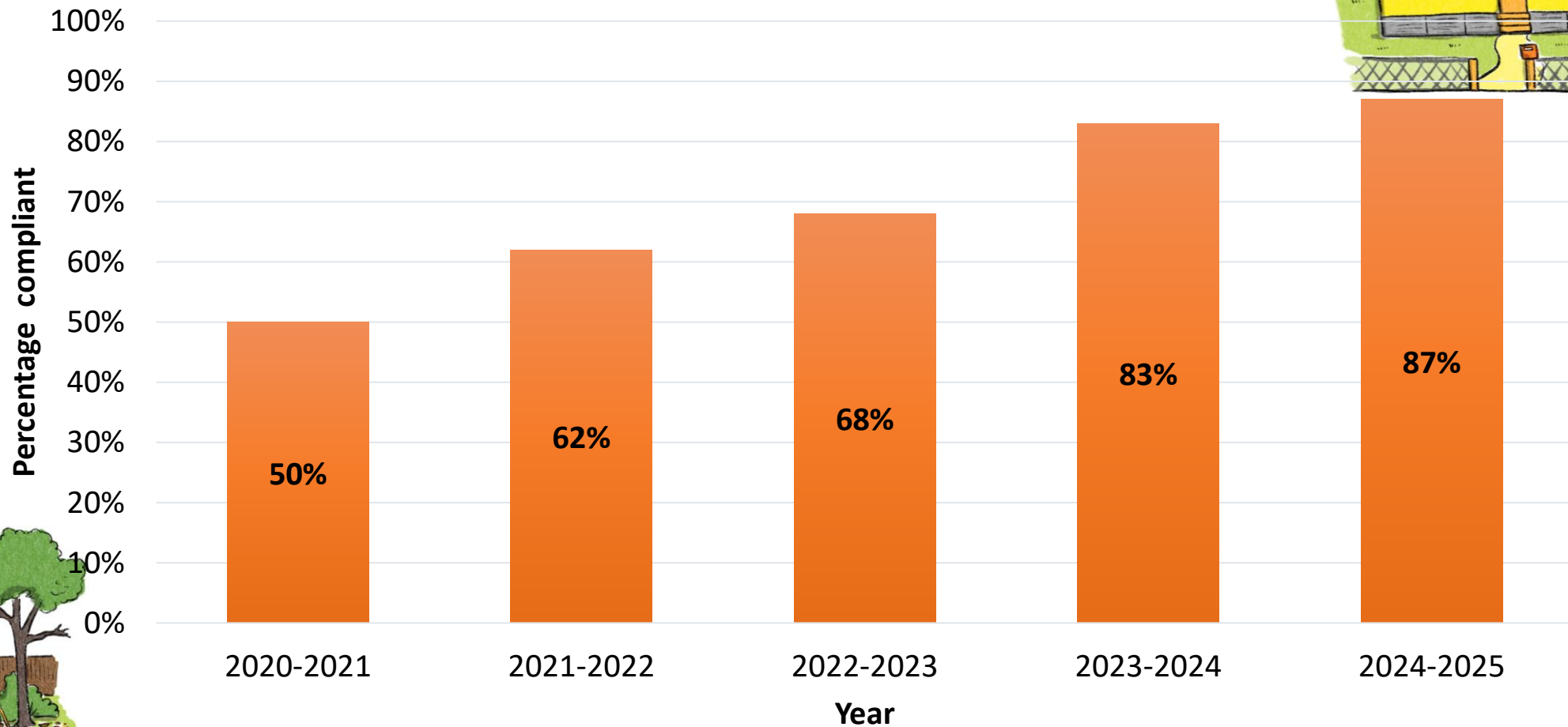


Workshop Impact Ratings



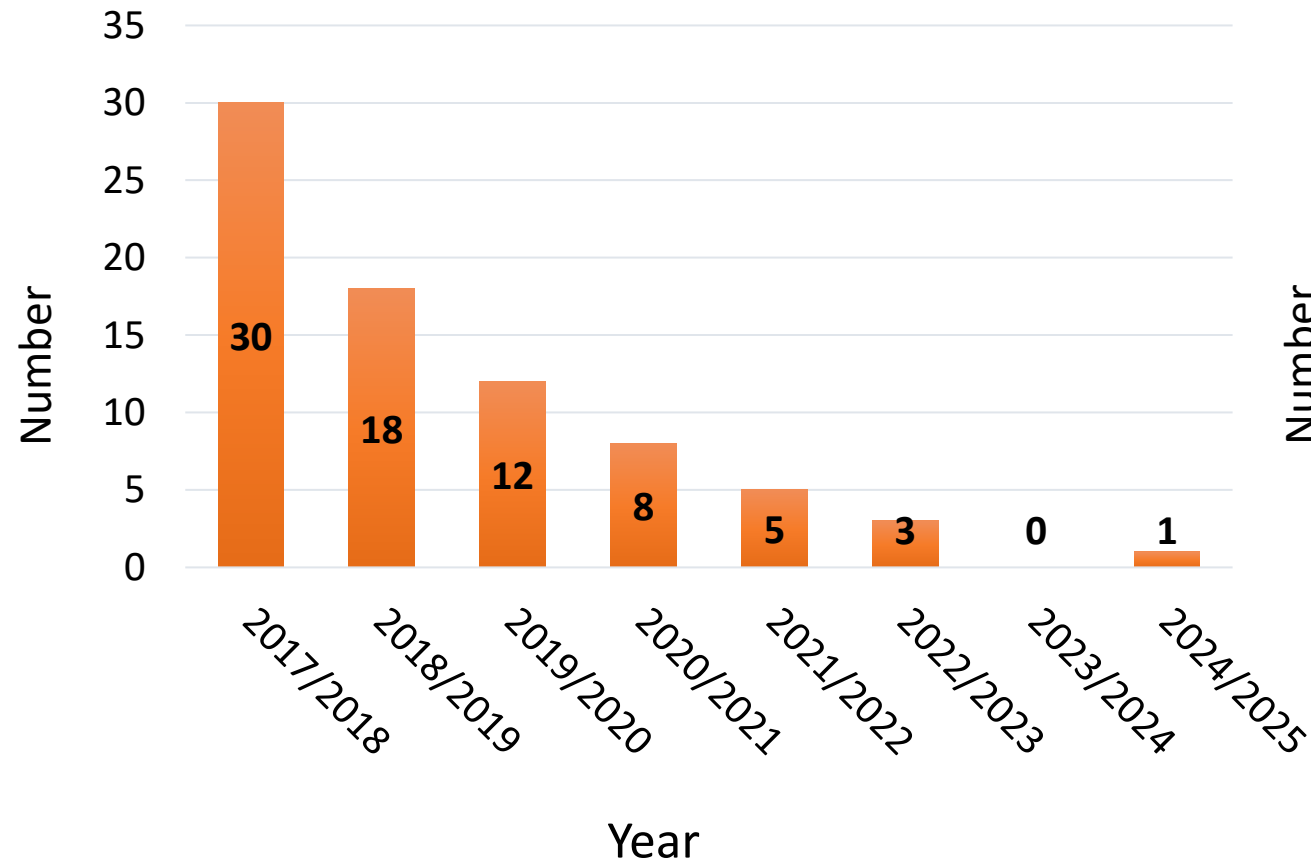


Property Compliance Rates

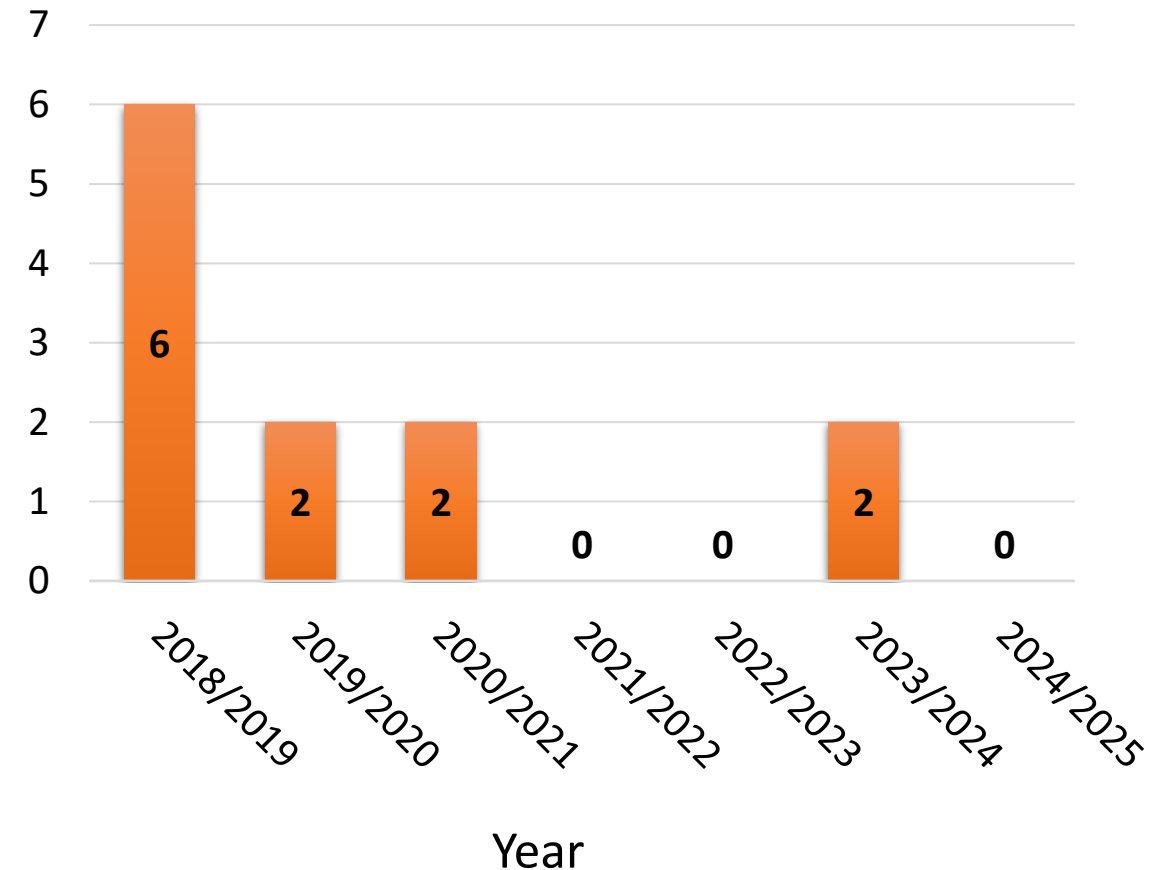




Bushfires ignited by escaped piles or burns (private)

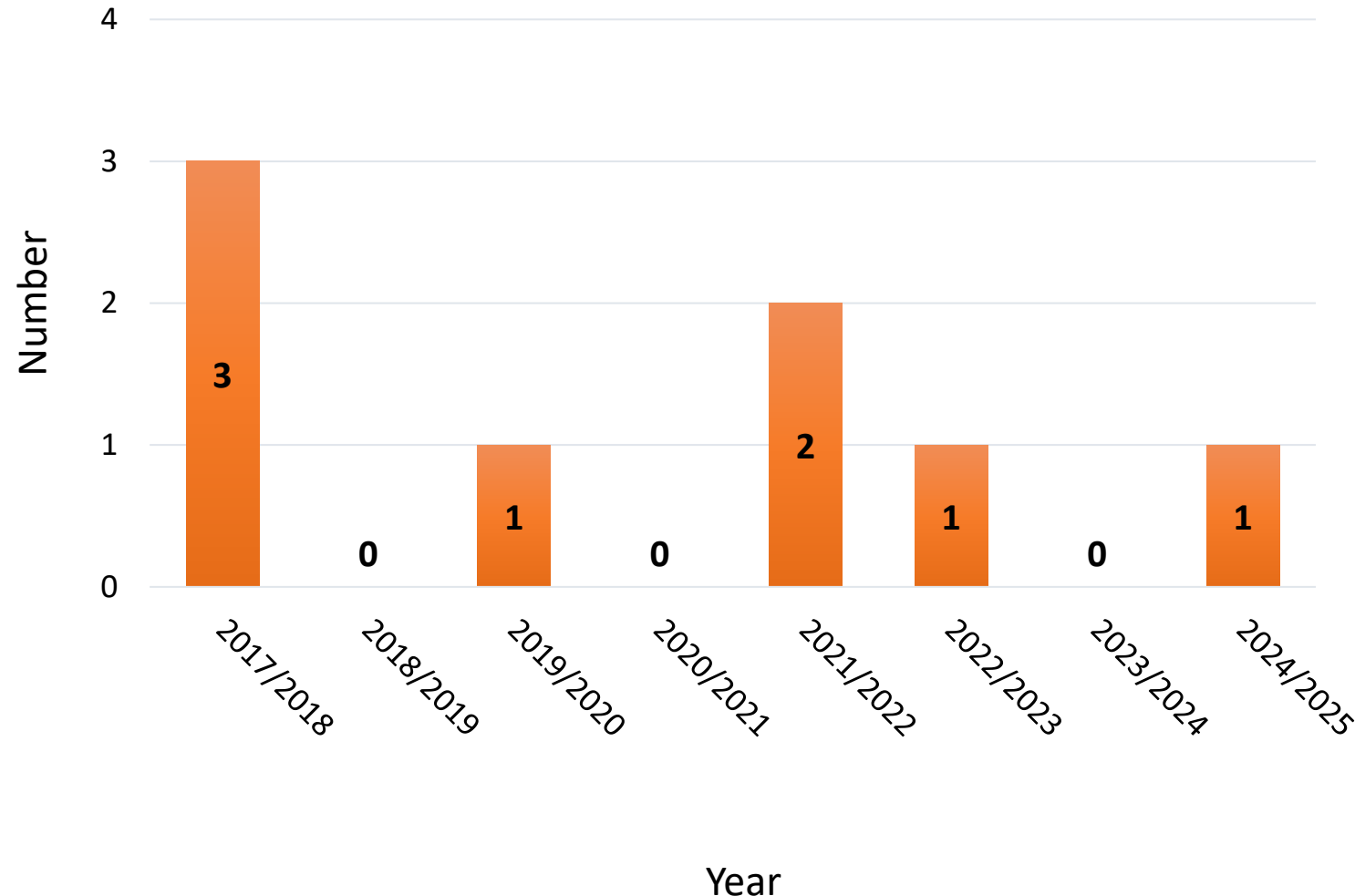


Bushfires started by camp/cooking fires



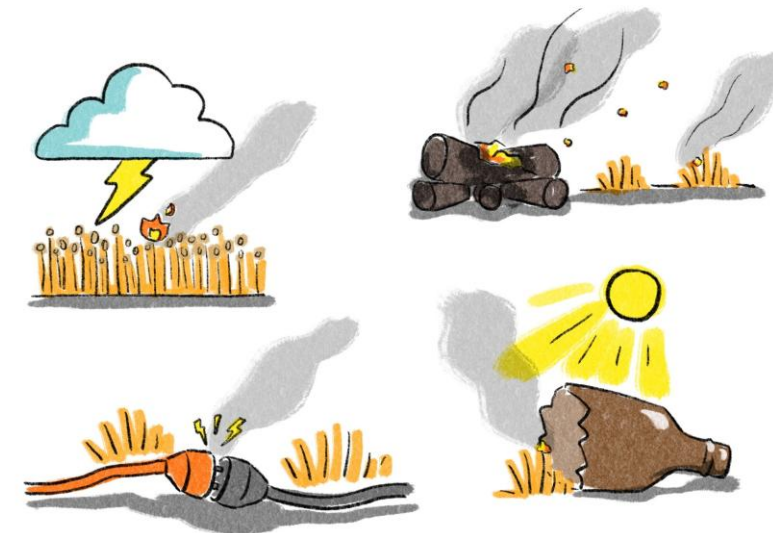


Bushfire Source: Other open flames/fire



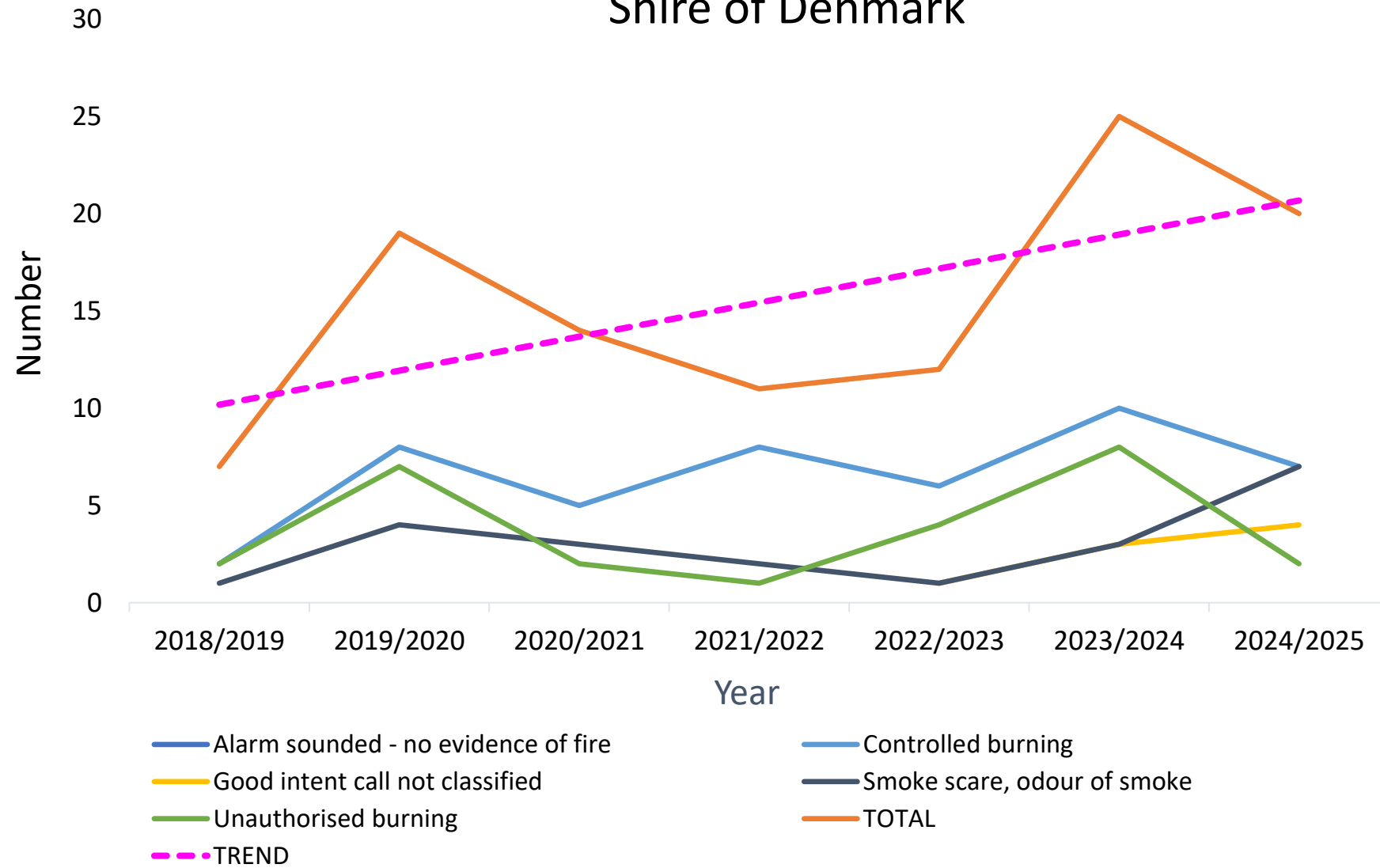
Relative constants:

- Average 1x farm equipment/vehicle fire per year (slashers)
- Average 2 arson/suspicious ignitions per year
- Occasional hot works accidents (<1 per year)





000 “False Call Good Intent” Shire of Denmark





Take it from us....to your town

Effective engagement on a shoestring

- **Understand your community and their risk issues**
- What's the biggest “bang for buck” for volunteer time – maximum number of residents and visitors you can engage, per hour?
- Deal with the biggest & most obvious risk first – people buy in when it involves them
- Start small and build on success – give people what they want, and then get people wanting more





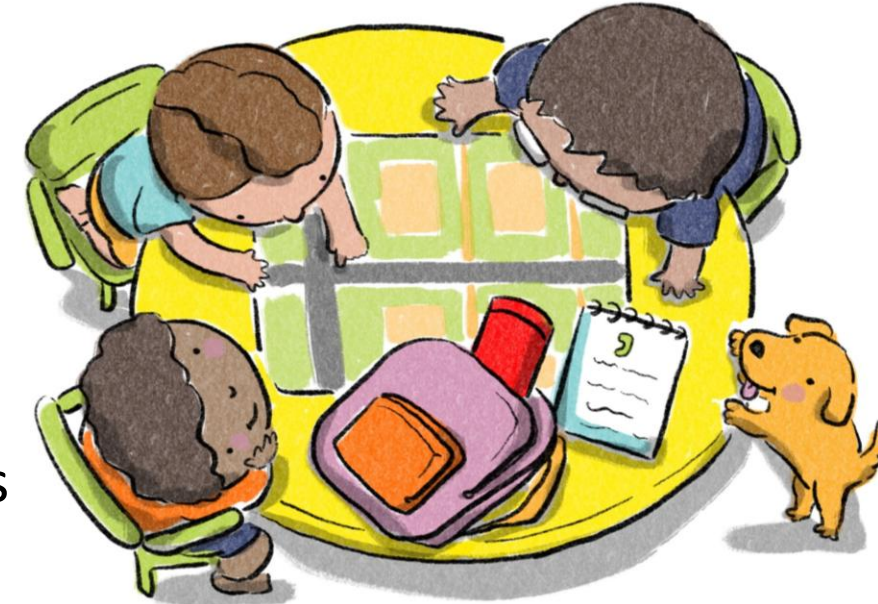
Don't reinvent the wheel

- LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION – make it easy for people to attend, hard to walk past
- Where and when would you capture the largest number of people, in your town?
- What existing relationships can you draw upon?
- What other events can you piggyback for “a good day out”?
 - Football games? Agricultural show? Shopping day in town? Christmas markets?
 - (Why pay for food trucks if they are already going to be somewhere?)
- How do you make your message UNMISSABLE?



Intergenerational magic

- When you get kids excited, they bring their parents and grandparents along with them
- Design an activity or experience that young kids are thrilled by (and make it locally relevant)
- Good prizes (find a sponsor)
- Make your activity an explicit conversation starter (and prompt the conversations)
- Don't rely on newsletters for advertising
- In-person enthusiasm is infectious and builds relationships
- Let your flashing lights and bright PPE work their magic!





Celebrate collective effort and investment

- Build a team that love working together, and who can do it without you (reduce burnout) – and celebrate the wins with volunteers
- Source prizes and sponsorship from EVERY business in your town. Ask in person.
- Make sure sponsors are heavily publicised - make it harder to be a “grinch”
- Identify “everyone wins” partnerships – eg work with local hospitality venues for events that also benefit them (bar/food sales etc)
- Ensure media/press message highlight the contributions of local businesses
- Be cheeky – name your event the biggest/best in your area - people want to be involved and be around success



We invite you to apply the lessons from “Denmark Bushfire Ready” to your community and kickstart a grassroots all-hazards movement, to build... “Australia: Emergency Ready.”






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Thank you to our partners



@brenna-quinlan 

Thank you to our other team members!



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