

IAWF Issues Paper

International cooperation

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate discussion among IAWF membership and the broader fire community about what it means to be an international organization, and why it is a value worth pursuing.

In some cases, we have responses to the questions posed below. In all cases we hope to provoke ideas and insights as part of a broader discussion among the international wildfire community.

International is the first word in our organisation's title.

International is implicit in our Diversity and Inclusion Policy:

Becoming a diverse and inclusive organisation will enable the International Association of Wildland Fire to learn from others, grow our understanding, and find new ways to address, understand and implement solutions to complex problems.

As a measure of success in diversity and inclusion the IAWF has set itself the following goals in relation to international:

Our Direction – Now and for the Future

Beginning immediately, we will strive to achieve:

- *Geographic diversity within the membership, Board members and all other IAWF activities.*
- *Greater inclusion of other underrepresented groups (age, Indigenous, disability, etc)*

We will implement this direction by:

- *Actively encouraging and proactively seeking membership from all parts of the globe*
- *Actively encouraging and proactively seeking members from all different professional backgrounds within the global fire community*

Key questions for membership

What does it mean to be an “international” association?

- How do we think bigger, past the immediate problem or crisis?

Why is being international something to pursue?

- “All fires are local.” vs “What’s happened to you has already happened somewhere else.”

Response: We need to better share knowledge and experience. We need to overcome the idea that we are unique. We need to identify the common concepts across international borders – for example weather dynamics, vegetation types, bird and animal habitats. It is important to identify what is specific to your problem versus what is common about your problem. We can all learn from both aspects. What’s happening to you has probably already happened somewhere else and there lies the potential for cooperation internationally. Climate zones are changing the habitat, species and the fire zones, and in turn changing the populations and landscapes potentially impacted by fire.

What have we learnt from international cooperation and exchange?

- What are the similarities and differences?

Response: We learnt that we have very similar needs when it comes to IT systems, however we continue to develop those in isolation. Most systems are considered to be ‘sunk’ investment and as such many agencies may be comfortable in sharing those to others free of charge.

Response: We have already learnt much from each other during exchanges and have brought back new ideas and systems, which have been implemented.

Which countries/regions are most appropriate for global wildfire network?

- What resources are needed to make this happen?

What are the most appropriate areas for international cooperation and what are the challenges involved?

- **Suppression – dealing with longer seasons, scarce resources, compatible skills, rising costs.**

Response: There is no jurisdiction in the world that has enough resources – alone - to deal with their wildland fire suppression issues into the future.

Response: Suppression exchanges have been occurring globally for more than two decades. Strong support during fire seasons has also been happening internally in North America and Europe. From the year 2000, suppression support exchanges occurred on a



regular basis between Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand. More recently, South Africa provided ground crews to Canada. A number of questions arise from these exchanges including: "Is that enough?", "What will happen with ever extending fire seasons length and overlaps?", "Should we have mobile and global suppression resources that can move around based on where the potential risk is and forecasted fire activity?", "Where globally should suppression support be extended to – what other countries are in most need?"

- **Knowledge/training/research – shared insights, better ways of working, avoiding repeating errors, safe working environments**

Response: There are some examples of sharing materials but overwhelmingly we have differences in the way we train people across the globe. One example of successfully applying the same curriculum and training is a leadership course conducted by a private provider from the US that delivers training courses in the US, Canada and Australia. This allows for faster and better integration when it comes to suppression deployments.

International networks – what are they, what is their value, how to maintain and build?

Response: We have a strong program of regular conferences that enable us to share learnings internationally. These include the Fire Behaviour and Fuels conferences across multiple countries, plus other conferences either run by the IAWF directly or supported indirectly like Wildfire Brazil 2019.

The IAWF has links with other like-minded groups with similar interests but in different parts of the world – these include, but are not limited to, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, the National Fire Protection Association, California Fire Exchange, Pau Costa, Lessons Learned Center, AFE, international aviation, Fire Chiefs, and others.

Many online resources – websites, social media groups, webinars – connect the wildfire community across borders and time zones. These are effective low cost, high participation platforms that complement the more intensive face to face activities.

The IAWF *Journal*, *Wildfire* magazine and *Wildfire Today* are well established and respected publications with international content, authors, topics and editorial committees/editors. They exist to promote wildfire science and knowledge internationally for researchers, operational staff and government organisations.

Background

Steinberg, Michele. 2017. "International Cooperation Produces Valuable Learning Exchange on Wildfire Safety: The 14th International Wildland Fire Safety Summit in Barcelona." NFPA Xchange (blog). February 2, 2017. <https://community.nfpa.org/community/fire-break/blog/2017/02/01/international-cooperationproduces-valuable-learning-exchange-on-wildfire-safety-the14th-international-wildland-fire-safety-summit-in-barcelona>.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). 2017. "Words into Action Guidelines: National Disaster Risk Assessment Hazard Specific Risk Assessment. Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment." United Nations.

https://www.unisdr.org/files/52828_o6wildfirehazardandriskassessment.pdf.