

THE RESPONSE TO THE GLENMORE-STRATHNETHY WILDFIRE BY LAND-BASED AND RURAL BUSINESSES

A REPORT FOR THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

MONDAY 31 AUGUST 2026

About Scottish Land & Estates

At Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) our work helps to ensure that rural Scotland thrives. We are a membership organisation for landowners, rural businesses and rural professionals. We promote the wide range of benefits land-based businesses provide: tourist attractions, leisure facilities and landscapes enjoyed by the public, as well as housing, employment, tourism & enterprise, sporting and farming opportunities. We represent the interests of our members and wider rural Scotland to the UK and Scottish Governments to help ensure that policy and legislation reflects the unique requirements of rural Scotland and its communities. SLE is a member of the Scottish Government Wildfire Strategic Oversight Group and Scottish Wildfire Forum, and our members have been actively engaged in wildfire prevention, preparedness and response.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I. **Land-based, rural and conservation businesses mounted a substantial response to the Glenmore-Strathnethy wildfire which burned more than 3,300 hectares in July-August 2026.** The assistance came via estates, plant-hire and construction businesses, wildfire consultants, forestry and arboriculture contractors, NatureScot and third sector interests.
- II. **Fire-behaviour evidence is central to understanding both the incident and the response.** The behaviour experienced had been predicted in the wildfire danger assessment of 12-13 July 2026, with extensive smouldering later predicted in follow-up assessment. However, this should not be read as meaning that the fire's development was wholly predictable. The significant wind change to a westerly on Friday 24 July materially altered fire behaviour and had a major impact on fire growth at that point. The fire was predominantly fuel-driven, with occasional slope-driven behaviour and a short wind-driven phase, observed flame lengths generally of 1-2 metres and extensive smouldering and re-burning in heavy heather, moss/litter, undecomposed organic matter and peat.
- III. **A survey commissioned by Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) records more than 40 named businesses or organisations that were contacted, volunteered assistance, were authorised to assist, or were placed on standby during the response.** This included more than 50 employees and contractors who volunteered or were made available by their employers during the course of the fire, with at least 70 on standby in the event of the fire threatening Tomintoul. In most cases the response depended on individuals choosing to assist, with employers releasing them from normal duties and, subject to future funding or reimbursement arrangements, absorbing or recording the associated costs. The full scale of the response has not been captured due to the ongoing efforts of impacted landholdings.
- IV. **The response included more than 250 recorded pieces of specialist off-road wildfire equipment, heavy plant, water-carrying capability and hand tools, with a combined stated equipment value of nearly £6.4 million.** This included Argocats with fogging units, Can-Am vehicles, ATVs, bulldozers, tracked and wheeled excavators, Marooka dumpers, tractors, water tanks, bowsers, pumps, leafblowers, beaters, chainsaws, radios and PPE.
- V. **The data records a considerable private and third sector personnel contribution, including multi-day involvement. In total, the survey returns record 266 person-days and 38 person-nights volunteered, authorised to assist, or placed on standby.** Several responders worked extended days and nights, with some plant operators recording shifts of up to 15 days or nine nights across the incident period.
- VI. **The tactics employed included direct firefighting, hot-spot suppression, fogging-unit deployment, leafblower suppression, tactical backburning, helicopter attack, creation of firebreaks, opening access tracks, clearing**

vegetation, digging ponds for helicopter water supply, damping down and supporting Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) crews.

- VII. **Respondents repeatedly emphasised that local land-management knowledge, muirburn experience, off-road access, water-moving capability and heavy plant were critical capabilities. Respondents also recorded recurring weaknesses in registration, tasking, muster points, check-in/check-out, communications, welfare, PPE supply, integration with helicopters and clarity of command and control.**
- VIII. **A notable feature of the Glenmore-Strathnethy response was the number of capable volunteers and contractors who travelled to muster points or stood by with equipment but were not deployed, were turned away, or were sent home.** This included several plant operators, estate teams and specialist responders with wildfire-relevant equipment.
- IX. **The report also demonstrates that significant land-management capability was available but not always fully used.** Respondents identify under-use or delayed use of heavy plant, ATVs, thermal drones, water-moving equipment, common VHF communications, local knowledge and trained personnel.
- X. **Helicopter support was valuable albeit within operational limits.** Helicopters slowed fire spread and supported suppression in difficult terrain, but their availability was weather-dependent and reliant on private contractor availability. They provided a useful direct attack capability, but only within suitable fire-behaviour limits, including flame lengths below approximately 4 metres. Helicopter support is best utilised in support of ground crews rather than as a standalone suppression solution.
- XI. **There is a clear policy risk if muirburn licensing undermines the practical capability that supports wildfire preparedness.** Much of the estate-based equipment, trained personnel and fire-behaviour knowledge recorded in the response exists because estates undertake and prepare for planned muirburn. If lawful muirburn becomes impractical, uncertain or commercially unjustifiable, Scotland risks losing part of the ready-made wildfire response reserve currently sustained by land-based businesses.
- XII. **The main practical lesson is the need to move from ad hoc goodwill to a formal, exercised wildfire capability system.** A live capability register, linked to a standard mobilisation process, should identify estates, contractors, conservation bodies and specialist advisers before incidents occur. That system should be tested through multi-agency exercises covering muster points, registration, command and control, aircraft tasking, radio use, water logistics, heavy plant use, welfare, PPE and end-of-shift accountability. It should also produce clear actions, owners and review dates so lessons from previous wildfires are not lost.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1. This report summarises the contribution made, and offered, by land-based and rural businesses during the Glenmore-Strathnethy wildfire response. It draws on contact records and follow-up survey returns from estates, contractors, plant-hire businesses, wildfire consultants, conservation bodies and other rural operators. The evidence demonstrates both the scale of goodwill and practical capability available from the private and third sectors, as well as the operational barriers that limited the full use of that capability.
2. The Glenmore-Strathnethy incident drew support from a wide geography and from a wide range of business types. Responders included estates such as Rothiemurchus, Seafield & Strathspey, Balmoral, Moray, Glendoe and Wildland Ltd; plant and construction businesses including MacDougall Plant Hire, O'Hare Construction, GC Campbell, Duncan G. Grant Ltd and CR Contractors; wildfire specialists from Bright Spark Burning Techniques; and public-sector land interests including NatureScot.
3. This report does not offer a complete picture of the response. Some of those known to have been involved (including impacted landowners such as RSPB Scotland) did not respond to the survey on account of ongoing dampening down efforts, while others involved in the response have not yet been identified. The numbers presented are therefore conservative and it is likely the true figures are much higher.

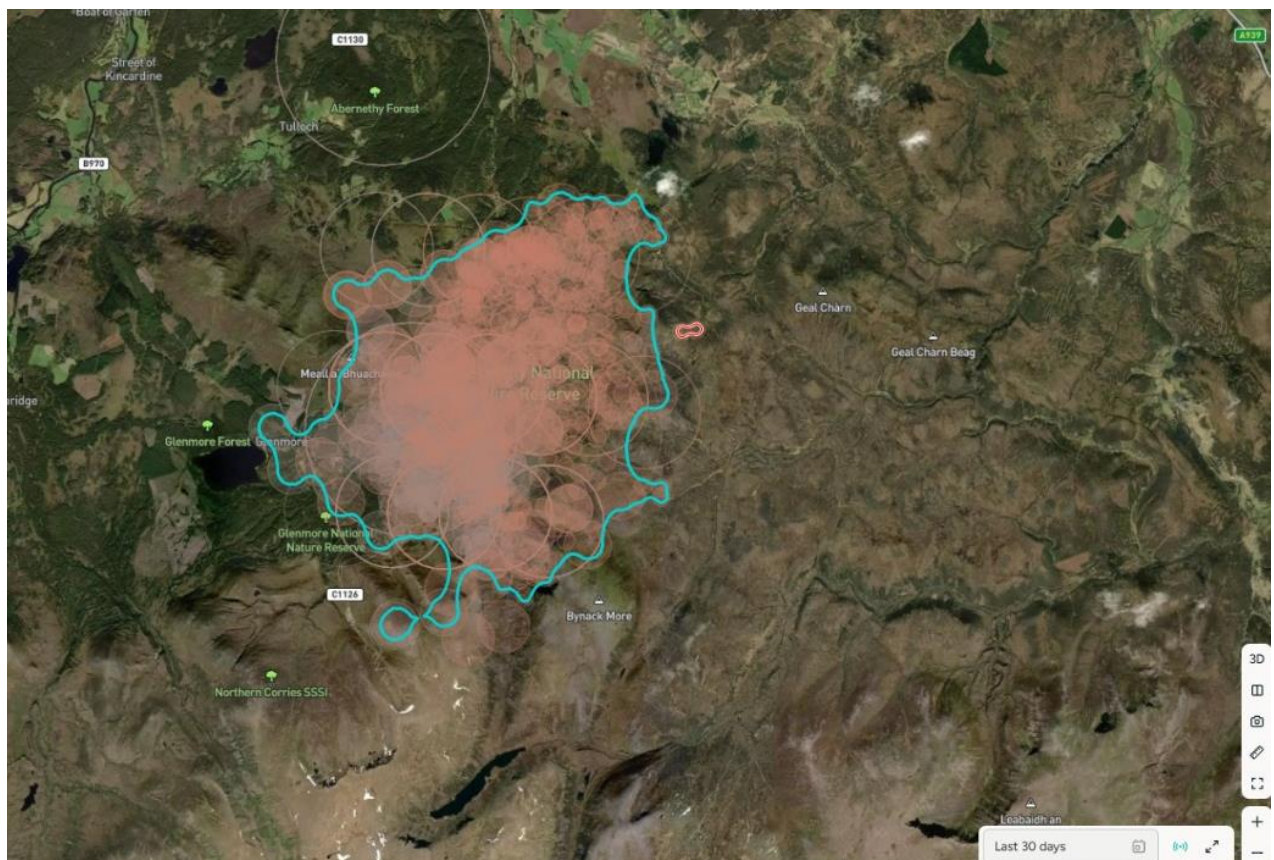


Figure: WildfireSolution satellite summary of the Glenmore-Strathnethy fire extent supplied by Firebreak Services Ltd, showing hotspot clustering, mapped fire perimeter, burnt area, affected area and fire confidence.

4. Fire-behaviour evidence provided by Firebreak Services Ltd is also important context for the land-management response. The behaviour experienced had been predicted in the wildfire danger assessment of 12-13 July 2026, before the fire started on the afternoon of Wednesday 15 July, with extensive smouldering subsequently predicted in the follow-up assessment of 28 July. However, this should not be read as meaning that the fire's development was wholly predictable. For most of the incident the rate of spread was slow, but the significant wind change to a westerly on Friday 24 July materially altered fire behaviour and had a major impact on fire growth at that point, the same day that the muster was organised.
5. Observed flame lengths were generally in the range of 1-2 metres, with a maximum of around 3 metres, which is consistent with the highest satellite-observed fire intensity of 3,479 kW/m and a corresponding heathland flame length of approximately 3 metres. The heather moor fuel load was extremely high across the above-ground shrub, moss/litter and undecomposed organic matter layers, all of which were available to burn at points during the incident.
6. Large areas also re-burned, with some ground burning up to three times, progressively consuming moss/litter, heather stick, undecomposed organic matter and eventually peat. No crown fires were observed, but there was extensive smouldering in peat and around tree roots, creating a falling-tree hazard where root systems had been undermined. Overall, the fire was assessed as predominantly fuel-driven, with occasional slope-driven behaviour and only a short period when it became wind-driven.

THE SCALE OF THE RESPONSE

7. The contact records show that more than 40 businesses and organisations were contacted, involved or placed on standby. Survey responses then provide detailed evidence of personnel involved, standby arrangements, equipment availability, tactics used and operational barriers encountered. Taken together, the evidence shows a large informal rural resilience network capable of responding rapidly. The issue was not that people moved too quickly or before there was a clear task. Rather, it was the gap between the speed at which rural capability became available and the speed at which command, registration, tasking and communication arrangements were able to absorb that capability. Future CONOPS arrangements therefore need to ensure that the formal response can match the pace of the land-based response, while keeping resources safely under SFRS command.
8. Personnel contributions were significant. More than 50 employees were involved during the course of the fire, with at least 70 on standby in the event of the fire threatening Tomintoul. The evidence should not be read as implying that employers instructed staff into hazardous situations without choice: in most cases individuals volunteered or agreed to assist, while employers released them from normal duties and either absorbed the associated costs or recorded costs that may require reimbursement through future arrangements. NatureScot recorded multiple staff involved over several days, Wildland Ltd recorded staff working between eight and

twelve days, Rothiemurchus recorded eight days and one night, Seafield & Strathspey recorded four personnel across several days and nights, Bright Spark Burning Techniques recorded specialist staff involvement for both day and night operations, and some plant businesses recorded extended involvement, including Duncan G. Grant Ltd. and GC Campbell.

9. The value of private machinery and equipment placed at risk was also substantial. Returns include high-value bulldozers, tracked and wheeled excavators, Morooka dumpers, Argocats, Can-Am vehicles, tractors, bowzers, water tanks, pumps and trailers. Several businesses also recorded costs for service, repair, damage or wear, including fogging-unit servicing, Argocat damage, punctures, damaged tracks, broken radios, bulldozer wear and equipment cleaning or repair.

EQUIPMENT AND CAPABILITY CONTRIBUTED

10. The survey returns allow the equipment contribution to be illustrated by type. Because the raw data includes both deployed equipment and equipment placed on standby, the figures below should be read as recorded available capability rather than confirmed simultaneous deployment. Where descriptions overlap, similar items have been grouped to avoid overstating precision.

Recorded wildfire equipment and capability by type		
Equipment / capability type	Recorded quantity	Notes on grouping
Argos / Argocats / Argo-type vehicles, including water pumps or fogging units	36	Includes Argos, Argocats and Argo-type vehicles with fogging units, pumps or water tanks recorded in survey returns.
Leafblowers	45	Includes estate and standby assets, including leafblowers listed for suppression and hotspot work.
Tractors, tractor-and-swipe units, tractor-and-trailer units and tractor/bowser combinations	17	Includes tractors, swipes, tractor-and-low-loader combinations and tractor-based water capability.
Can-Am / 6x6 buggy / similar off-road utility vehicles	14	Includes Can-Am vehicles and 6x6 buggies with pumps or fogging units where recorded separately from Argos.
Excavators, diggers and 360 machines	11	Includes tracked, wheeled, 8-ton, 13-ton and 16-ton machines, plus 360 diggers with shears and grabs.
Water tanks, bowzers, IBCs and field water-carrying units	11	Includes standalone tanks, field bowzers, water tankers and IBC-based water carrying capacity.
Fogging units, mist sprayers and handheld foggers	10	Includes trailer fogging units, handheld foggers and mist sprayers where listed as discrete equipment.

Trailers and low-loaders	10	Includes trailers, low-loaders and tri-axle / heavy plant transport capability.
Bulldozers / dozers	4	Includes bulldozers and dozers recorded as deployed, available or ready for transport.
Dumpers / Morooka dumpers / tracked dumpers	4	Includes Marooka and tracked dumpers, some fitted or associated with water or fogging capability.
Hand tools and smaller suppression equipment	At least 40	Includes beaters, shovels, picks, backpack sprayers, chainsaws, radios and PPE. These are likely under-recorded.

11. The response was highly practical and capability-led. Estates supplied off-road access and mobile suppression equipment, including Argocats, Can-Am vehicles, ATVs, trailer fogging units, handheld fogging units and water tanks. These were used for firefighting, hot-spot work, backburn support, damping down and moving personnel across difficult ground.
12. Plant and contracting businesses supplied capability not possessed by public sector responders including: bulldozers, 360 excavators, tracked diggers, wheeled diggers, shears, grabs, dumpers, mulchers, tractors, low-loaders and heavy transport. These assets were used, or offered, for creating firebreaks, clearing trees, opening tracks, creating access to the fire front, shifting machinery and digging water points for helicopter use.
13. Firebreak Services Ltd provided a distinct specialist capability through strategic remote wildfire consultancy support. This included interpretation of fire behaviour, fire danger, fire spread and hotspot information, alongside discussion of appropriate tools, tactics and strategies with key managers during the incident. Firebreak Services Ltd also advised senior SFRS personnel and others at an early stage that heavy plant would be required, and that wetting agent could be useful. In addition, the company supplied 18 x 25-litre tubs of wetting agent, distributed across five organisations, together with the associated COSHH information.
14. A further important contribution came from personnel with muirburn and wildfire experience. Many estate staff and wildfire consultants had experience of controlled burning and vegetation management, as well as the impacts that fire behaviour, smoke, wind, access and terrain have on suppression efforts. The evidence shows that this knowledge was most effective when integrated into structured tasking, risk assessment and SFRS operations, but was less effective where responders were left on standby, sent between muster points or turned away without clear explanation.
15. A significant proportion of the private capability recorded in the above table – particularly the highest-volume assets such as Argocats, leafblowers, tractors and all-terrain vehicles – is bought, maintained and retained by estates because it supports planned muirburn operations. These assets are not held primarily as public

emergency-response equipment. Rather, they exist because estates routinely need trained people, all-terrain mobility, water-moving capacity, ignition control, suppression equipment and fire-behaviour experience to undertake managed burning safely. This creates an important policy risk: if muirburn licensing becomes so restrictive, uncertain or impractical that muirburn is materially harder or effectively unachievable, estates may have less reason to invest in the equipment, training and staffing that currently provide Scotland with a ready-made wildfire response reserve. Disinvestment would be a second-order consequence resulting in fewer fogging units, fewer ATVs, fewer leafblowers, fewer trained operators and less practical fire experience when wildfire occurs.

TACTICS USED ON THE GROUND

16. The tactics recorded in the returns included direct firefighting, hot-spot suppression, fogging-unit work, damping down, spotting, use of beaters and backpack sprayers, tactical backburning, helicopter guidance, creation of firebreaks and track access and water-point creation. Bright Spark Burning Techniques returns also highlight the value of structured briefings, rapid risk assessment, check-ins after initial deployment and refined plans as wind conditions changed.
17. Where the response worked well, it appears to have depended on trusted local leadership, clear sector-level command and practical deployment of the right assets to the right task. Examples include estate and contractor teams working alongside SFRS, wildfire consultants supporting tactical backburning and helicopter guidance, contractors creating firebreaks and access tracks, as well as NatureScot staff operating as self-contained teams under internal supervision while tasked to hotspots.
18. The evidence also highlights the value of pre-planned heavy plant deployment. The first bulldozer deployment was on Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) land at Glenmore, following a request from land managers on the fireground which was escalated to the night-time FLS Duty Manager. The decision was made easier because the potential need for bulldozer support had already been anticipated in the FLS fire plan. This illustrates the importance of having heavy plant options identified in advance, with clear authority to deploy them when conditions require.
19. The use of wetting agent was also reported as partially successful. It appears to have assisted knockdown efforts significantly and follow-up discussions have been held to amend guidance. However, the evidence suggests that its effectiveness depended on adequate water volume, appropriate concentration and sufficient mop-up and patrolling resources to deal with smouldering. Feedback from the contractor who used it most was that wetting agent has the potential to save significant time and water, particularly during mop-up, if applied within the right operational framework.

OPERATIONAL WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED

20. The strongest and most consistent theme in the evidence is not a lack of willingness or capability, but a lack of preparedness to absorb that capability into the formal response. Multiple responders recorded confusion over who was in charge, where they should report, whether they were required, and how they were to be tasked. Several capable operators travelled to Nethy Bridge, Abernethy, Tomintoul or other muster points only to be stood down, left waiting, or sent home.
21. The concerns recorded include poor information release to the public, poor registration at the start of the incident, unclear muster-point arrangements, inadequate check-in and check-out, lack of welfare checks during long shifts, insufficient PPE replacement, weak mobile phone signal, limited radio provision, limited integration with helicopter tasking and inconsistent acceptance of local land-management expertise.
22. There was also frustration that some heavy plant and experienced personnel were not used at the main fire when respondents believed they could have made a material difference. Evidence from plant operators and estate responders points to delayed tasking, limited situational awareness and unnecessary duplication or under-use of assets. Some businesses also reported that private machinery bore the cost of damage, servicing or wear without an obvious reimbursement mechanism.
23. Attempts to improve communications were also constrained. Firebreak Services Ltd sought to mobilise the COTAG HQ trailer, which has Starlink internet and powerful VHF radio capability and could have provided the land-management sector with logistical and communications support. However, because they could not establish communication with SFRS Incident Command, the initiative could not be progressed.
24. There was also insufficient consideration of the additional resources available from the land-management sector and, in some cases, limited understanding of the tools, vehicles and machinery being offered. Examples include the use of ATVs for crew transport and the importance of compatible VHF radio communications between ground teams and helicopter pilots. Respondents also raised concerns that breaks, welfare and fatigue management for all staff on the fireground were not given sufficient priority, contributing to exhaustion, dehydration and excessive stress.

AERIAL SUPPORT

25. The key aerial lesson from Glenmore-Strathnethy is not simply that helicopters need to be better integrated once they arrive – it is that the current approach to aerial support is not sustainable. The survey records both the value of helicopter support and the practical work required on the ground to support aircraft, including water-point creation, firebreak construction, plant deployment and coordinated tasking. However, Scotland currently relies heavily on private helicopter contractors who may have commercial obligations elsewhere. That means mobilisation can be delayed precisely when aerial support is most needed, while the number of available aircraft can vary during the course of an incident. This creates uncertainty for incident commanders, frustrates ground tactics and weakens the ability to plan around aircraft as a dependable suppression asset.

26. The evidence also underlines the need to recognise the operational limitations of helicopters in wildfire suppression. Helicopters can provide direct attack only within suitable fire-behaviour limits, including flame lengths below approximately 4 metres, and should generally operate in support of ground crews who ultimately extinguish the fire. Their effectiveness is therefore greatest when they are integrated with ground crews, heavy plant, water logistics, communications and mop-up planning, rather than treated as a standalone suppression solution.
27. That does not diminish the value of helicopters. Used well, they can slow fire spread, apply water in difficult terrain, support tactical decisions and buy time for ground crews. However, they are specialist, weather-dependent and currently uncertain because access is not guaranteed. The practical lesson is that Scottish Ministers must establish a contractual mechanism to guarantee access to appropriate helicopter assets during periods of VERY HIGH and EXTREME wildfire risk. Such a mechanism should include mobilisation standards, activation thresholds, availability requirements, funding responsibility, mapped water sources, refuelling and landing options, ground-to-air communications, trained helicopter liaison and clear procedures for linking aircraft with firebreak construction, tactical backburning, water-moving plant and hotspot suppression. It should also be supported by consideration of a UK-wide aerial wildfire capability, falling under resilience arrangements, to provide further redundancy where Scottish or private contractor capacity is unavailable, delayed or already committed. Helicopters should therefore be planned as part of a wider wildfire system – not treated as an emergency improvisation dependent on whether suitable aircraft happen to be commercially available.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE WILDFIRE RESPONSE

28. The Glenmore-Strathnethy evidence reinforces the need for a formal rural wildfire capability framework. The goodwill and equipment exist, but they must be identified, verified, trained, insured, mobilised and commanded. A purely ad hoc request for assistance risks attracting considerable capability without sufficient means to deploy it safely or effectively. That framework should also recognise a hard operational reality: helicopter support is highly valuable but not guaranteed under current arrangements. Reliance on private contractors without a guaranteed availability mechanism creates delays, variable asset numbers and uncertainty during the most dangerous conditions.
29. Future arrangements must also recognise the distinct contribution of land-based businesses: they understand terrain, fuels, access routes, water sources, wind, smoke, livestock presence, woodland edges, moorland vegetation and the limitations of machinery on steep or sensitive ground. That knowledge should be treated as an operational asset and not as an informal or peripheral addition to the response.
30. There is also a distinct policy risk if muirburn licensing becomes unworkable in practice. Much of the skill base, fire-behaviour knowledge and specialist estate equipment available during incidents are sustained because estates undertake planned muirburn. If lawful muirburn becomes too difficult, uncertain or costly to carry

out, the second-order consequence may be the gradual loss of both trained practitioners and the equipment they currently retain for safe burning and wildfire suppression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. **Build and maintain a live wildfire capability register via the Community Asset Register (CAR).** This should cover estates, farms, contractors, plant-hire businesses, forestry operators, wildfire consultants and conservation bodies, recording equipment type, operator availability, training, insurance, transport requirements and mobilisation constraints. The purpose should be to turn an informal goodwill network into a known, verified and taskable resilience asset before incidents occur.
32. **Promote and exercise a standard mobilisation and tasking process linked to the CAR.** This should include registration, triage, voluntary participation, employer release, deployment under SFRS authority, check-in/check-out, welfare monitoring, shift guidance, PPE requirements, insurance confirmation, cost recording and clear stand-down procedures so that responders are not left travelling unnecessarily, waiting without tasking, or being turned away despite offering relevant capability. The language and process should make clear that land-based responders are not being instructed by their employers into hazardous situations, but are volunteering or agreeing to assist within a controlled multi-agency system.
33. **Establish local wildfire groups in high-risk areas and integrate estate fire plans into wider wildfire management plans,** with agreed roles for estates, farms, rural businesses, the SFRS, local authorities, land agencies and specialist contractors. Estate-level fire plans should be linked into a larger integrated wildfire management plan for each high-risk landscape, covering prevention, preparedness, access, water sources, communications, heavy plant options, sensitive habitats, neighbouring landholdings and routes into formal command. Consideration should be given as to how public agencies – such as national park authorities and local resilience forums – can support such groups with administration and co-ordination. Groups should develop pre-agreed communication arrangements, including radio channels, mobile signal contingencies and clear information routes between incident command, sector commanders, land managers and machine operators.
34. **Ensure that land managers with muirburn and wildfire experience can be integrated into tactical planning,** particularly in relation to dealing with fire behaviour, backburning, positioning of fire breaks and helicopter suppression.
35. **Create a reimbursement and repair mechanism for private machinery and specialist equipment used in wildfire suppression,** including servicing, damage, wear, fuel and transport costs. This could mirror the arrangements put in place by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Scottish Land & Estates following the Carrbridge-Dava wildfire in 2025.

36. **Revisit the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) to clarify SFRS command, sector leadership and the role of land-management expertise.** The survey data repeatedly refers to confusion over who was in charge, inconsistent local decision-making and experienced responders being under-used. The CONOPS should make clear that all resources operating on the fireground remain under the control of the SFRS Incident Commander, who has ultimate responsibility for incident resolution and for the safety of all personnel deployed or authorised to assist. Regular multi-agency training and exercising will be key to rehearsing this approach, ensuring maximum awareness and compliance, and giving partner organisations confidence that their personnel and equipment can be used safely within SFRS command arrangements.
37. **Establish a renewed helicopter and pilot services framework exclusively for wildfire response.** This should put in place a contractual mechanism that guarantees access to suitable helicopter assets during periods of VERY HIGH and EXTREME wildfire risk, rather than relying on ad hoc private contractor availability. The framework should define minimum availability, mobilisation times, activation thresholds, funding routes, trained liaison roles, mapped water sources, refuelling and landing options, and arrangements for linking aircraft with ground crews, heavy plant, firebreak construction and hotspot suppression.
38. **Make formal representations to the UK Government that aerial wildfire support is a resilience issue requiring funding and a UK-wide approach.** Scottish Ministers should ask the UK Government for civil helicopter provision, specialist aircraft, national tasking arrangements and Military Aid to the Civil Authorities where civilian contractor availability is insufficient. This should reflect the fact that severe wildfire risk is no longer only a local operational matter: it is a resilience challenge affecting public safety, infrastructure, habitats, carbon stores and rural communities.
39. **Ensure muirburn licensing supports, rather than undermines, wildfire preparedness.** The evidence shows that much of the private capability most relevant to wildfire response is maintained because estates conduct, train for and support planned muirburn. If licensing arrangements make lawful muirburn impractical, unduly uncertain or commercially unjustifiable, the consequence may not simply be fewer managed burns – it may also be reduced investment in fogging units, all-terrain vehicles, leafblowers, trained operators and practical fire knowledge. The Scottish Government should therefore treat workable muirburn regulation as part of Scotland's wildfire resilience architecture, not as a separate land-management issue. If the licensing scheme undermines this in any way, consideration should be given to simplifying or scrapping the scheme.
40. **Create a joint land-manager, SFRS and public-agency exercise programme for high-risk landscapes.** Exercises should test registration, voluntary participation, employer release, command and control under the SFRS Incident Commander, command handover, aircraft tasking, radio use, water logistics, heavy plant deployment, integrated estate fire plans, tactical backburning, welfare, PPE, end-of-shift accountability and post-exercise action tracking. These exercises should be undertaken before the next high-risk season and should explicitly include those

private and third-sector capabilities most likely to be called upon during a major incident. Each exercise should conclude with clear actions, named responsibilities and review dates so that learning is demonstrably carried into future wildfire planning.

CONCLUSION

41. The Glenmore-Strathnethy wildfire response showed the depth of capability available from Scotland's land-based and rural business sector. Estates, contractors, conservation bodies and specialist advisers were willing to provide people, equipment, experience and local knowledge at pace. The survey records a substantial contribution of personnel, heavy plant, all terrain vehicles, fogging units, water-moving capability, firebreak construction, tactical knowledge and practical fire-behaviour experience. In many cases that contribution was significant and effective, but the evidence also shows that it was not consistently absorbed into a planned command, mobilisation and tasking system.
42. The same evidence shows that Scotland cannot rely on goodwill, improvisation or commercial availability alone. Aerial support must be treated as a resilience capability, with guaranteed access to helicopter assets during periods of very high and extreme wildfire risk and a route for UK-level consideration, including Military Aid to the Civil Authorities, where appropriate. Equally, the estate-based equipment and fire knowledge revealed by the survey should not be taken for granted. If muirburn regulation becomes unworkable, Scotland risks weakening the very skills, machinery and practical experience that formed a large part of the rural wildfire response.
43. The Scottish Government's strategic action plan for wildfire provides a strong foundation for that shift. Its content is broadly positive and points in the right direction on prevention, preparedness, response, partnership and governance. The central issue is now implementation: delivery must be accelerated so that the systems described in policy are operational before the next period of very high or extreme wildfire risk. This report also recognises that the action plan is being reviewed in light of the experience and lessons from the Glenmore-Strathnethy fire, and that review should be used to sharpen priorities, assign responsibilities and bring forward practical delivery dates.
44. The policy choice is therefore clear. Scotland can continue to discover during each major incident what capability exists, whether helicopters are available, who can move water, which machinery can reach the fireground and whether local expertise will be used; or it can build a formal wildfire resilience model before the next high-risk season. That model should combine public command, guaranteed aerial access, trained rural responders, workable muirburn regulation, heavy plant capability, communications, welfare and reimbursement arrangements. Done well, it would improve safety, strengthen operational effectiveness and recognise land-based businesses as essential partners in national wildfire resilience.

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