# MINUTES DETERMINE ACRES

## INTRODUCING FOKA

**Australia's fire seasons are becoming more intense and lasting longer. Vehicles deployed to fight them are not keeping pace. OKA is changing that, with a platform refined over four decades of real-world performance in Australia's harshest environments.**

This past harvest season was particularly severe across Western Australia's wheatbelt. On one farm alone, dry lightning strikes caused approximately $300,000 in lost crops and endangered the local town. The farm had firefighting equipment. It had volunteer crews on standby. What it did not have was a vehicle capable of reaching the fires fast enough in terrain that conventional fire trucks could not access.

As climate risk intensifies, FOKA is a dual-use solution that addresses the core firefighting gap while adding practical value to rural businesses outside of the fire season. This initiative by OKA was born from firsthand experience and frustration, with OKA's leadership team involved in large-scale wheatbelt farming and living with the operational realities of a changing climate.

OKA is a dual-use vehicle platform that operates as a productive farm asset for most of the year, while retaining rapid-response firefighting capability when conditions demand it.

Engineered with significantly higher payload capacity and all-terrain capability than a typical farm Ute with a standard slide-on fire unit, FOKA can carry up to five times more water into hard-to-reach terrain. Its Cummins driveline powers high-pressure pumps for safer and more effective water delivery. The platform is designed to access environments where other vehicles become immobilised, reducing risk to assets, property and lives.

FOKA is built on OKA's proven Gen-5 platform, operating on a wheelbase comparable to a Land Cruiser while delivering up to five times the payload capacity. That carrying capacity is

A spot fire breaking out on Bungala Farm during peak harvest conditions.

# WHAT FOKA IS: Fire. Flood. Farm. OKA.

typically associated with larger, slower medium-class trucks such as the Unimog, yet FOKA delivers it within a more compact platform that navigates tight farm tracks and fire trails with ease.

FOKA is engineered to combine the manoeuvrability of a farm ute with the payload capacity of a medium truck.

This is not new territory for OKA. Throughout the 1990s, OKA vehicles were widely deployed as fire response units across Australian shires and by the Royal Australian Air Force. FOKA builds on that proven foundation, updated for the realities rural communities now face in a changing climate.

## The Problem with Importing Solutions for Australian Problems

In 2017, the Victorian Government committed $32 million to upgrading a fleet comprising 290 Mercedes-Benz G-Class vehicles and 59 Unimogs for Forest Fire Management Victoria, positioning the investment as 'world-class firefighting capability'[1]. By October 2025, just weeks before one of Victoria's most significant bush fire seasons, the entire fleet of G-Class and Unimog vehicles was grounded following identification of cracks in the chassis and sub-frame.

With fire brigades already under pressure and CFA (Country Fire Authority) volunteers stretched, Victoria, one of the country's most fire-prone states, was forced to seek support from South Australia.

Victoria's G-Class and Unimog fleet, like many fleet solutions, is built on imported mass-produced OEM platforms originally designed for general market applications. Adapting these vehicles for Australian off-highway firefighting roles requires extensive aftermarket modification. In doing so, they are often pushed beyond their original engineering parameters, particularly under sustained use in Australia's harsh operating conditions. The results can be unpredictable, costly and potentially dangerous.

Victoria is not an isolated case. Across Australia, fire agencies are grappling with ageing, ill-suited fleets. In early 2026, the United Firefighting Union (UFU) reported that approximately 800 CFA trucks were classified over-age, and 64 per cent of Fire Rescue Victoria's fleet is past its intended service life[2].

This raises a broader question. The issue is not simply funding or maintenance, but whether the right vehicles are being selected for the environments in which they are expected to operate.

OKA is Australian engineered and built

specifically for Australian conditions. The platform has operated in some of the most demanding environments this country offers for more than

40 years. Under new Australian investment and management, OKA is building on that legacy, refining and modernising a technically mature vehicle platform to meet the evolving demands of today's operating environments.

## The Reality of a Changing Climate in Rural Communities

Western Australia is classified as 90 per cent bushfire prone, with more than 26,000 DFES volunteers responsible for protecting approximately 25 million square kilometres of land[3]. Within this area, the wheatbelt alone covers 15.4 million hectares across 42 local government authorities and contributes A$18 billion in annual economic output[4].

Volunteer firefighters, many of whom are farmers, form the backbone of bushfire response across the wheatbelt. One of them is Brad Jones.

Brad is a long-term wheatbelt farmer based in Tammin, Western Australia, and a non-executive director of OKA. He operates a large-scale cropping enterprise covering approximately 11,500 hectares in the central wheatbelt. During the most recent harvest season, Brad lost more than $300,000 in crop due to lightning strikes.

"As climate conditions change, we are seeing a clear increase in dry lightning strikes, with the recent harvest period particularly severe. In a record harvest year like the one we have just experienced, the risk escalates significantly. A single lightning strike can wipe out crops, critical farming infrastructure and even threaten nearby towns.

Within our shire, around 20 farmers remain on call throughout harvest. This year alone, we responded to more than a dozen fires, including a major incident on our own property that came close to threatening our town."

Across the wheatbelt and Australia, this model of volunteer-led response is common. Farmers protect not only their own assets, but their neighbours, their communities and the regional economy that depends on them.

For large-scale cropping operations, the risk escalates sharply during harvest. A single lightning strike can wipe out thousands of hectares of standing crop, destroy critical farming infrastructure and place nearby rural communities at risk. In high-yield seasons, the

OKA undergoing fire response testing in Western Australia's wheatbelt.

exposure increases proportionally. The financial consequences of a delayed response can be significant.

In response, farming communities band together to form volunteer firefighting resources. Teams of volunteers remain on call around the clock during and after harvest, pooling whatever equipment and manpower they must collectively protect their properties and region.

The challenge they face is not commitment. It is the capability of the equipment available to them.

Conventional fire trucks are designed primarily for sealed roads and structured urban response. Farm utilities fitted with slide-on units provide mobility but often lack the payload capacity and water delivery systems required for effective frontline suppression in remote terrain.

When lightning strikes, minutes determine whether hundreds of hectares are saved or lost. If the available equipment cannot reach the ignition point, containment is compromised.

## Why This Matters Economically

Large-scale rural operations, like Brad Jones's property, represent substantial capital investment. Whether in cropping, livestock, horticulture or plantation forestry, tens of millions of dollars in land, equipment and annual production can be exposed during peak fire danger periods. Losing even a portion of that asset base or seasonal income can have lasting financial consequences for operators and the regional economies that depend on them.

In many rural communities, frontline response is not delivered solely by government. Farmers frequently provide and operate their own equipment. Private tankers, Utes fitted with slide-on units and even repurposed ex-fire service tankers are common across the wheatbelt and other rural regions. In major incidents, privately owned units often arrive first and play a decisive role in early containment, particularly where official resources may take significant time to reach remote properties.

Much of the equipment used in volunteer However, the model exposes a structural tension.

Purchasing and maintaining a dedicated fire response vehicle that sits idle for most of the year is rarely economically viable for individual operators. At the same time, relying on improvised farm vehicles during high-intensity fire events introduces operational and safety limitations. The business case for investing in firefighting capability only works if the asset can serve multiple year-round operational functions beyond the fire season.

In practical terms, the vehicle must first function as a productive farm asset: high payload capacity for transporting materials and produce; driveline power take-off for operating equipment; and all-terrain access for routine property management. When fire conditions escalate, the same platform must transition immediately to frontline response, without requiring operators to maintain a separate specialised vehicle.

This is where OKA's engineering architecture and multi-use capability become critical.


OKA settling in for her summer residency at Bungulla Farm in Western Australia's wheatbelt.

**If you are a farmer, rural operator, emergency services provider or industry partner interested in FOKA's development, we would like to hear from you. Follow OKA Australia on our social channels for updates as testing progresses.**


**Contact:**

OKA Australia
www.okaaustralia.com
info@okaaustralia.com

Prepared by Zoe Barnes,
Executive Director,
OKA Australia


Sources


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