



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

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Submission by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) NSW Chapter to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry

Preface

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for the Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship. We provide our members with training, recognition and a community of practice, to share knowledge, ideas and action. With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design and planning of the natural and built environment.

In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,500 landscape architects and promotes excellence in planning, design and management for life outdoors. Committed to designing and creating better spaces in Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to improve the nation’s liveability through a unique approach to planning issues via innovative integrated solutions. In doing so, landscape architects contribute towards better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Australians

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) welcomes the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry. Our members were concerned and shocked this year and felt that as designers and managers of the landscape we have an obligation and an opportunity to contribute and improve practice.

AILA’s National Advocacy Committee met in January and February 2020 to consider and discuss AILA’s response to the bushfires. AILA NSW met in May 2020 to hold a Bushfire round table discussion with its members. This letter is an amalgamation of these discussions, the responses of our members and our understanding and training in design and managing landscape to minimise bushfires.

We also draw your attention to the response to the Bushfire Royal Commission provided by AILA National. [[Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements](#)]



Recommendations

1. Living with bushfires

- a. Government and community must recognise that bushfires are a condition of the natural world and its climate - in any country - and are largely the result of not denuding the landscape. In other words, countries that have few forests have few bushfire issues but also a lack of connection to their country and its biodiversity.
- b. Australia has a prominent issue with dangerous bushfires because unlike many other countries we have a large amount of forest in relation to our population (and developed areas) and our country is generally dry and susceptible to changes in climate.

2. Minimising anthropomorphic climate change

- a. Minimising human induced climate change through landscape architecture practices, regenerative design, sustainable transport and development and the general wise use of resources, can help reduce the likelihood and consequence of bushfires and make them more predictable.

3. Good quality urban landscape is valuable and multipurpose

- a. Covid 19 has shown us how valuable landscape is for the communities of NSW and Australia. It is beautiful and gives character to the places we live. It supports recreation, active transport and health. Landscape can improve air quality in towns and can provide shade. Landscape can slow bushfires, provide wind shelter and provide places of refuge. But if not designed, or not designed well, landscape can also contribute to safety issues including crime, fire and flood.
- b. Landscape has to serve many functions and uses and only landscape architects can design landscape to achieve all these different outcomes. The inquiry must avoid a 'knee jerk reaction' to the dangers of landscape and consider the myriad of uses and values.

4. We must get better at collaboratively managing landscape

- a. Our society has a bias towards creation and development and not management. Any country's success with managing bushfires is dependent on its management of the landscape. Landscape that we live in, or with, must be managed so that the consequence of bushfires is controlled. That is not to say that all landscape must be maintained, but we must understand when we can be safe in letting the landscape be self-reliant and when we have to intervene. There are many established skills and strategies for managing the Australian landscape spanning grass cutting, weed removal, arboriculture, redesign and species replacement, hazard reduction burning and Aboriginal cultural burning. Value and resources must be attributed to these practices.
- b. We must work together and learn from Aboriginal Knowledge holders, landscape architects, farmers and the fire service.



5. Better guidance

- a. AILA and landscape architects have developed guidance for practitioners over the decades, however we believe it is time for a more collaborative approach that can be applied to all those involved in the planning, design and management of the landscape.
- b. Perhaps in the same way that the Police Force and landscape architects have collaborated to develop Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines to deter crime (before the police need to become involved), Fire Prevention Through Environmental Design (FPTED) guidelines could be developed to help deter dangerous bushfires before the fire service needs to become involved. Working with Aboriginal knowledge holders and the Rural Fire Service, landscape architects offer their services to help in developing such guidelines.

6. More access to landscape architects

- a. Many towns and regions of NSW have few landscape architects or none at all. Where there are landscape architects these are often not used to their full potential. Councils and other public land holders should proactively employ landscape architects to work on the management of the landscape within and around towns and collaborate with the other experts including Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and the Rural Fire Service.

7. Better Training

- a. AILA acknowledges that it can better inform its landscape architects regarding landscape design and management in relation to bushfires. Subject to the outcomes of the Inquiry it is committed to initiating an awareness course for its members.

Yours Sincerely

Lee Andrews
President AILA NSW



Gareth Collins
NSW Advocacy Committee Chair

