



21 May 2020

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/make-submission-to-bushfire-inquiry?fbclid=IwAR2Fbrnw-EzWVgV65Fms6FVCfIDfCir3KcPaQ2Y4WpGNAPdtQxYhlvDYt4>

NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry,
GPO Box 5341,
Sydney NSW 2001

inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sirs

Re Terms of Reference Point 2 (current laws) and Point 5 (preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks)

The aim of Friends of Berowra Valley is to protect the natural landscape, heritage and biodiversity of Berowra Valley while making the valley more accessible to the community.

Berowra Valley is a small, narrow area of bushland with high scenic and conservation values and needs to be managed for the preservation of these values and the benefit of the general community.

Many suburbs surrounding this valley are at high risk from fires with the suburbs of Cowan, Berowra, Mt Kuring-Gai, Mt Colah, Asquith, Hornsby, Normanhurst, Thornleigh and Pennant Hills all having a long interface with dangerous wildfires coming from the north west. These areas, and others in the rural part of Hornsby, need to be prepared against wildfires.

Point 2 current laws

We do not believe the current 10/50 Clearing Code serves the valley well for three major reasons:

- It leads to a false sense of security. Some of the local residents sincerely believe that if they cut down all the trees and reduce the undergrowth within 50 m that they will be safe in a wildfire. They therefore do not attend to more detailed fire protection of their property to reduce the effect of ember and radiant heat attack. Garden design and the fine details of house preparation are neglected.
- It leads to unnecessary clearance of trees in the urban areas. Despite Hornsby Council's excellent DCP 2013 "Tree and Vegetation Preservation" trees are being cut down all along the bushland fringes. The felling of these trees is sometimes unrelated to fire management, but their removal can be justified by the 10/50 Clearing Code. As Berowra Valley is a narrow valley this tree removal and understory clearance has a severe impact on the conservation values of the bushland.
- In extreme conditions such as the summer of 2019/20 this type of broad-brush approach to vegetation management would have given little protection to park neighbours. Wildfires in other parts of the State burnt through areas burnt just weeks before

We would therefore like the 10/50 Clearing Code removed and replaced by a system that would both keep residents safer and preserve the conservation values of the valley bushland and its surrounding suburbs. We note that the 5-year statutory review has not taken place. We also note that the 10/50 Clearing Code is inconsistent with 'Planning for Bushfire Protection', 2018

Point 5 (preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks)

The Friends of Berowra Valley would like a fire protection plan based on current fire science and designed to protect the environment as well as life and property.

Some of the crucial features would be:

- A holistic approach to protection where vegetation management, town planning, house location and design as well as construction materials are all given consideration
- A more complex approach to vegetation management for example Victoria, through the CFA, have issued guidelines about garden design and plant selection for four risk environments in the state. The CFA guidelines include "carefully select, locate and maintain trees" as an objective, not their complete removal <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/landscaping>. Trees have a vital role in property protection and this role should be incorporated in a new plan.
- Better administrative procedures, for example:
 - A better, more accurate mapping tool that reflects, amongst other factors:
 - Any entitlement areas accurately
 - Property protection measures
 - A rigorous assessment procedure by appropriate experts, ecological and fire, before vegetation management takes place.
 - Identification and location of rare species and Endangered Ecological Communities needs to be done by experts, not by the landholder.

- A greater engagement of the RFS with advice on vegetation and property management. The local RFS has numerous information displays at community events but they are only usually seen on site during fires or because of a complaint. A system needs to be in place where they are more proactive with onsite advice rather than applying simplistic codes. We believe that the Bush Fire Environmental Code provided for hazard management appropriate to the site.
- Clearly stating that bordering property holders do not have the right to clear any of the NPWS estate and council land. A mechanism where on site protection is adequate needs to be devised.

Greater Sydney Commission

Reversing the decline in tree canopy is a key objective of the Greater Sydney Commission. With 10/50 Clearing Code still in place, self-assessment taking the place of expert advice and with so many properties within 50 m of bushland it is very unlikely that this key objective can be met.

Conclusion

A more sophisticated, scientific and environmentally appropriate approach to fire management needs to take place and the blunt tool of 10/50 Clearing Code removed.

Yours

Chris Yates
Secretary