

## Your details

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**Title**

Mr

**First name**

Matt

**Last name**

Horne

## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

**Consent to make submission public**

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

Since 2013 our local group of residents have been writing to Great lakes Council (now Mid Coast Council) about the bushfire risk in the Burgess Beach Area. Time & again we have requested for the bush to be cleared or controlled. At various points in the Burgess Beach area, bush is on the north, northwest, east, south & south-west of residences. A particular area of concern is the scrub along Burgess Road. We were assured by council that this scrub was old growth littoral rainforest & would not burn. Our research has confirmed that the areas of concern were clear &/or cow paddocks in 1972 & the claim of old growth littoral rainforest is false. On the 7th & 8th of November 2019 bushfire raced towards our houses. At one point we had fire on both sides of us. The work of the RFS & in particular the fire bombing planes & helicopters saved numerous houses. The alleged littoral rainforest did in fact burn. The scrub that we had been pleading to be cleared or controlled also burnt. Since then we (the residents group) have been in

contact with Mid Coast Council (MCC) about the obvious danger. The Asset Protection Zone regulations of 20 metres are not being followed by MCC. MCC have trimmed some branches during March 2020, but have again refused to take action on our bushfire threat. The experiences of November 2019 have residents here, many of them elderly, terrified about the prospects of summer 2020.

## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

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The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

Failure by MCC to clear/control scrub & bushfire risk

### **1.4 Any other matters**

Image 1 was taken in 1972

Image 3 was taken after the November fires

The Residents Letter was sent after the Nov fires. It is one of numerous correspondences sent to council

## **Supporting documents or images**

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### **Attach files**

- Image 3.JPG
- Resident's letter.docx
- Image 1.jpg

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Dear Sir/Madam

In light of the recent unprecedented bushfires on the north coast of NSW, the residents of Burgess Beach, Forster feel that the time is to revisit our situation and to act upon it, is right now.

As summer proper approaches, the drought continues to worsen & large tracts of our local area lie blackened we can no longer live with the now discredited promises that we are safe from bushfire risk. MidCoast Council (hence MCC) has a duty of care to its residents, especially after it has been alerted to a potentially dangerous situation & to ignore those concerns would amount to negligence.

A quick look at our area via <https://earth.google.com/web/@-32.20180547,152.5428246,13.90176442a,1607.47517219d,35y,-0h,0t,0r> shows that the area south of Karloo St has bush & scrub to its north, north-west, west, east, south east & south. The fires on 7<sup>th</sup> November burnt areas between Kentia Place & Lakeview Crescent, then ember attack ignited the bush within Booti Booti National Park. Residents near the Burgess/Lakeview intersection had fire either side of their properties. The fast acting & heroic RFS plus the jet drop of fire retardant saved numerous properties that day.

Numerous correspondences with the then Great Lakes Council resulted in the creation of an Asset Protection Zone (APZ) of 20 metres along Burgess Rd, from the littoral rainforest. In numerous locations along Burgess Rd the distance between the trees and houses is closer to 10 metres, rather than 20; 50% of what we were promised. We are aware that council considers the asset being protected to be the forest, not the properties and people. Access for services to the "asset" (the forest) is the priority, not the houses and residents. Great Lakes Council were adamant that the bush & trees growing along Burgess Rd were littoral rainforest, old growth & in existence for centuries, hence it could not be cleared to increase bushfire safety for residents. The two attached images taken in 1972 confirm that this is not the case. Image 1 shows low level heath on the cliff face, with a significant distance to open cow pasture, then to the bush of Cape Hawke. Today that same area is covered in dense growth and is connected directly to the heavily forested Booti Booti National Park. Image 2, taken from (what is now) numbers 67 & 65 Burgess Rd shows the area to be clear of any growth above knee height. The length of Burgess Road is now fronted by bush as high or often higher than a two-storey house. Residents have implored council to establish a 30 metre APZ and it is noteworthy that Western Australian councils are moving to 50 metre APZs in response to climate change.

The alleged littoral rainforest has three stormwater run off drains feeding directly into it, concentrating water & garden fertilisers into an area already substantially overgrown & lacking in any serious management. Residents have been "assured"

that this tangle of vines, cassia and lantana will not burn & that bushfires do not come from the south. The people of nearby Wallabi Point & Diamond Beach can assure you that this could not be more incorrect. Image 3 shows littoral rainforest burnt by a fire from the south, only 200metres from homes that lie on an incline; proven in too many Australian bushfire tragedies, to be the most dangerous fire geography. Lining parts of Burgess Rd, directly above the flammable scrub & in front of houses are eucalypt trees, ironically planted amidst the allegedly environmentally sensitive littoral rainforest by Great Lakes Council in the 1980s, creating an even more combustible fire profile.

Clearing of bush also allows the re-creation of views for tourists along one of NSW's premier whale watching locations. Long time residents remember tourist buses visiting Burgess Rd for the views; a completely futile exercise today. The long-muted Forster coastal walking path would have Burgess Beach as its highlight, rather than its shame. We all enjoy our bush surrounds and wildlife; it's part of the attraction of living here. We have no intention or desire to destroy it, merely to improve safety of lives and property.

The clearing of bush in the Burgess Beach area has the obvious advantage of being a pro-active step in the protection of lives and property. There are many adaptation strategies for climate change & the prevention of bushfire should be one of them. Residents find great hypocrisy in having to meet often stringent bushfire regulations for building and renovations, yet simultaneously being unable to act against the threat that surrounds them. MCC currently has only one policy document relating to climate change, the *Climate Change Risk and Adaptation Plan* for the Gloucester region, from November 2010. This nine year old document has no relevance to the situation at Burgess Beach. Our neighbouring councils are well ahead of MCC on climate change adaptation strategies. Port Stephens Council's *Coastal Management Plan* of April 2019 addresses climate change adaptation. Port Macquarie-Hastings Council have a total of 32 pages of climate change related policies & documents. MCC's lack of action for residents & current ennui relate to a clear lack of policy direction, creating uncertainty for residents in a time when action is so obviously required.

We hope that the current situation sees action taken quickly by council, so that this does not become a drawn-out campaign by residents against bureaucracy, that has the potential to end tragically.

This letter is the result of recent resident meetings & I write on behalf of all Burgess Road & Lakeview Crescent residents.

Regards

Matt Horne







