

This paper represents the combined view of the five Group Officers of the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Rural Fire District.

As an overarching comment the response to the bush fire crisis by the NSW Emergency Services and State Government was exceptional. Undoubtedly there were areas that could be improved upon with the benefit of an After Action Review by each Service.

The intent of this submission is to highlight some observations regarding the management of public land in NSW.

In our District the key land managers are National Parks, Crown Lands and Local Council. The RFS is the key agency used to implement Hazard Reduction (HR) strategies, however has limited ability to influence. These agencies appear to be driven predominately by area burnt as opposed to establishing strategic priorities to protect assets.

As a result some burns are very resource intensive, large and sometimes problematic, have limited weather windows due to terrain and more often subject to EPA exclusions given the potential smoke generated.

Given the significant urban interface in our District, some of these provide only limited strategic value and protection of residential assets.

The process to obtain approvals for HRs is overly cumbersome, bureaucratic and lengthy. The major issue appears to be obtaining the relevant environmental approval. This often appears to be a factor of the lack of qualified people (at Council or Parks) to provide these approvals.

It is our view that the current approval process and land area based approach should be reviewed. We believe that the following improvements should be considered as part of that review;

- In urban interface areas, the focus should be on creating strategic APZ's behind properties that provide a defensible zone. These burns would be inherently smaller and are often bounded by creeks, fire trails and roads.
- The fire management of the areas of urban interface, should be the domain of the RFS as the combat agency. This would ensure the priority is focused on protecting life, assets and the environment. These activities would still occur in consultation with local stakeholders being Council, Parks and Crown Lands. It would however change the focus of the activity.
- In the Sydney metropolitan area it would be unlikely that these smaller scale burns would impact environmentally sensitive areas. Accordingly environmental approvals should not be required (generally the biggest time delay). Environmental issues will be addressed by limiting burning intervals to say 5-7 years and continued use of the current mosaic burning patterns.
- These burns are less resource intensive, easier to manage and do not generate the level of smoke that larger burns do. They provide greater strategic value and can be implemented quickly and efficiently.
- The current process remains appropriate for larger scale burns, which are still required in some areas to impede known fire paths.
- For KPI purposes, HR management should be focused on properties directly protected as opposed to area burnt.

It is our belief that these issues are not isolated to our District.

Whilst HR's are not the silver bullet to mitigate all risk, we believe that the current process is overly complicated, lengthy and biased towards area burnt versus properties directly protected.