



Your details

Mrs

Title

First name

Carol (Poppe)

Last name

Zouroudis

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

Submission type

I am submitting on behalf of my organisation

Organisation making the submission (if applicable)

Mountain Districts Association

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Secretary

Consent to make submission public

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I live in a beautiful rural area surrounded by nature. The area also has much industry including farming and mining. I am part of a local community group that works hard to protect the environment for all of us. Our area was affected by the recent bushfires and we were very fortunate to escape with little damage to people and property due to tireless volunteer workers. However, the surrounding bushland was very much devastated. We need to protect what is left. We understand the need to cut

down dangerous trees, but fear that without proper assessment and approval, too many trees will be lost.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

- Most property losses during the 2020 bushfire season were due to severe to catastrophic intensity of the fires which no amount of tree or vegetation clearing could ameliorate. Even already burnt grasslands were re-igniting. Spot fires occurred kilometres from the fire front, endangering built assets with little or no surrounding tree or shrub cover.
- Allowing clearing without approval is likely to result in environmental considerations being either disregarded or inadequately assessed.

1.2 Preparation and planning

- Vegetation should be assessed by experts from or accredited by the RFS to determine the bush fire risk, rather than having the responsibility assigned to landowners. Self assessment is still too complex for landowners to determine whether clearance is legal and whether valuable environmental assets are being unknowingly removed
- Native vegetation should not be cleared without a well-informed assessment, particularly if it is only a low bush fire risk. The environment should be a key consideration in managing bush fires. Many homeowners are unlikely to know what threatened species, habitat values and other environmental matters should be considered.

1.3 Response to bushfires

- The RFS must regain its role in providing onsite advice and approval for hazard reduction activities. Property owners have confidence in RFS advice. People should be encouraged to ask for assistance from existing qualified officers to help assess environmental and bush fire management matters, not rely on poorly informed self assessment.
- Vegetation management should be promoted as just one of a suite of bush fire prevention measures, and not as the only solution. Lessening engagement by the Rural Fire Service with at-risk communities has reduced the important role it plays in advising homeowners in other key bush fire management and maintenance measures.
- Homeowners need to notify the RFS and relevant councils of vegetation clearance proposed so local fire managers have an up-to-date understanding of the clearance being undertaken. Monitoring vegetation clearance carried out under the 10/50 Code is not possible without having a comprehensive reporting process in place.
- Opportunities to reduce bushfire hazards that are legal and lawful are welcome. However, at a time when there is still ongoing removal of healthy trees under the 10/50 scheme for reasons that often have little to do with bushfire hazard protection, and where reversing the decline in tree canopy is a key objective of the Greater Sydney Commission, a formal review of the RFS 10/50 Clearing Code should be undertaken, separate to this Bushfire Inquiry.

1.4 Any other matters

- The 10/50 mapping tool is inaccurate with buffer zones not aligning with borders of vegetation hazards. Numerous properties are caught in the entitlement areas that should not be included. The entitlement areas apply even if only one or two square metres of a property are within a buffer zone. This allows unnecessary tree removal as well as significantly increasing

building costs. There should be a mechanism whereby individuals can get incorrectly assessed properties removed from the entitlement areas, making alterations or new homes less costly.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- Bushfire enquiry.docx
-



Mountain Districts Association

Working for our Rural Community and the Environment

www.mountaindistrictsassociation.com.au

19th May, 2020

I make this submission on behalf of the Mountain Districts Association. We are a community group based in the hinterland of the Central Coast, west of Gosford and the M1

NSW Bushfire Inquiry - Terms of Reference Point 2 (current laws) and Point 5 (Preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks). The following concerns are raised with regard to the RFS 10/50 Clearing Code:

- Vegetation should be assessed by experts from or accredited by the RFS to determine the bush fire risk, rather than having the responsibility assigned to landowners. Self-assessment is still too complex for landowners to determine whether clearance is legal and whether valuable environmental assets are being unknowingly removed.
- The practice of removing all trees within 10 metres and all vegetation within 50 metres of a habitable dwelling (10/50) is inconsistent with many recommendations of the recently gazetted Planning for Bushfire Protection 2018. PBP recommends clearing on the hazard side of a dwelling, 10/50 permits it on all four sides of a dwelling.
- Native vegetation should not be cleared without a well-informed assessment, particularly if it is only a low bush fire risk. The environment should be a key consideration in managing bush fires. Many homeowners are unlikely to know what threatened species, habitat values and other environmental matters should be considered.
- The RFS must regain its role in providing onsite advice and approval for hazard reduction activities. Property owners have confidence in RFS advice. People should be encouraged to ask for assistance from existing qualified officers to help assess environmental and bush fire management matters, not rely on poorly informed self-assessment.
- Homeowners need to notify the RFS and relevant councils of vegetation clearance proposed so local fire managers have an up-to-date understanding of the clearance being undertaken. Monitoring vegetation clearance carried out under the 10/50 Code is not possible without having a comprehensive reporting process in place.
- Opportunities to reduce bushfire hazards that are legal and lawful are welcome. However, at a time when there is still ongoing removal of healthy trees under the 10/50 scheme for reasons that often have little to do with bushfire hazard protection, and where reversing the decline in tree canopy is a key objective of the Greater Sydney Commission, a formal review of the RFS 10/50 Clearing Code should be undertaken, separate to this Bushfire Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,
Carol (Poppe) Zouroudis
Secretary
MDA