

Title	Mr
First name	Michael
Last name	Brearley
I am making this submission as	Other
Submission type	Organisation
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	Wingello Village Association
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	President
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	Refer attached submission
1.1 Causes and contributing factors	Refer attached submission
1.2 Preparation and planning	Refer attached submission
1.3 Response to bushfires	Refer attached submission
1.4 Any other matters	Refer attached submission
Upload files	WVA-Letter-Wendy-Tuckerman-3-February-2020.pdf - Download File



Wingello Village Association Incorporated

PO Box 5103 WINGELLO NSW 2579

Email president.wva@gmail.com

ABN 25 400 425 322

3 February 2020

Mrs Wendy Tuckerman MP
PO Box 168
GOULBURN NSW 2580

Sent by email to goulburn@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mrs Tuckerman,

SUBMISSION FROM WINGELLO VILLAGE ASSOCIATION – BUILDING A RESILIENT COMMUNITY

The Wingello Village Association committee has carefully reflected on the aftermath of the bushfire, which devastated sections of our village on the night of 4 January 2020. Our thoughts are with those who lost their houses, and we are thankful for the gallant efforts of those who worked so hard to limit the damage to only 12 houses, and numerous outbuildings. We must now focus our efforts on working with our community and with state and local government to make our community more resilient and safer for all.

The Wingello Village Association will be hosting a community meeting in Wingello Hall at 3 pm on Saturday 22 February, at which we will be focussing on measures to make our community more resilient. We warmly invite you to attend this meeting, to listen and to respond to our community as you may see fit.

Some of the key considerations in building a more resilient community are described below:

1. Management of Road Corridors

With respect, we believe that the management of roadside vegetation is grossly inadequate. All exit routes are covered with a tree canopy. Residents drive the roads to Wingello in constant fear. Overhanging branches, and indeed whole trees drop without warning in any weather conditions, particularly in windy conditions or after rain. Often the fallen trees are not reported to Council because of Council's long response times. Fallen trees and limbs are cleared off the road by volunteers, at any hour of the day or night, at no cost to Council.

Despite many requests to Council, several years have passed since Council has undertaken maintenance on the dangerous roadside vegetation. Many in the local community believe that Council has an unbalanced emphasis on environmental initiatives that place the safety of trees before the safety of human lives.

On the 4 January, the fire approached Wingello from the south-east. The access road to dwellings south-east of the village (Forest Rd) was blocked for some time due to fallen trees and limbs. Luckily, most residents in the village could escape using one of the other three exit routes. If those exit routes were blocked by fallen trees like Forest Rd was, residents trying to flee the fire would be trapped, with catastrophic consequences.

Just yesterday on 2 February 2020, Highland Way was blocked on the northern exit from the village by a fallen tree. Thankfully, our volunteer Rural Fire Brigade was on the scene soon afterwards to clear the road, at no cost to Council. Thankfully, no vehicles were under the tree when it fell. Photographs of the situation have been included as an attachment to this letter.

We respectfully request that Council undertake urgent maintenance of the roadside vegetation that, through neglect, has been allowed to grow to the point where it is dangerous.

2. Removal of Radiata Pines.

Radiata pines are a species that have been introduced into pine plantations by Forestry Corporation and its predecessors. Over many years, these species have crept into the village, particularly on road reserves, and have not been removed. Radiata pines have shallow roots, they grow very tall and split and drop when they are old. They also drop pine needles which are highly flammable.

On the night of 4 January, firefighters saw radiata pines explode, as fire slammed into the village. Many of these radiata pines, located in road reserves and crown land, were the conduit that allowed fire to race through the village. Whilst a small number of these pines have been removed since the fire, there are many, many more fire affected radiata pines, where roots have caught fire and they are dropping branches. They are unstable.

Please rid our beautiful village of radiata pines and assist us with the planting of more appropriate species.

3. Water Supply.

One of the limitations to firefighting is the lack of pressurised water supply in the village. This has proved a real safety issue, and Wingello is certainly not resilient when it comes to future fire events. If it was not for the forward thinking of the RFS by organising for the 2 water gins on the railway siding, losses would have been much higher. Fire appliances had to leave properties to pump water from these gins all night. The urban Fire and Rescue tankers that helped save our village rely on pressurised water to fill them. Because there is no pressurised water in the village, water had to be pumped to them from the RFS appliances on the night, thus tying up two appliances to obtain water whilst properties burned. How much more could have been saved with water hydrants in streets?

Whilst Council has previously engaged with the community regarding water supply, and there was a vocal negative response from some, we must now reconsider the matter. We understand that a pressurised town water supply is technically feasible. There is ample water available in Bundanoon Creek Dam. The water supply could be extended from Bundanoon and pumped to a large reservoir to the highest point in Wingello. From there it can gravity feed to our village, which means that pressurised water is available, even when there is no power.

We are acutely aware however, that affordability is a critical issue for residents. We also understand that there are many residents who have invested tens of thousands of dollars in bores and private water arrangements, and they are fortunate to have ample water. Some of those residents have strongly opposed a town water supply in the past, possibly to the detriment of a silent majority who were not so vocal. As each new bore is installed to a deeper level, the security of the groundwater supply becomes more compromised. Please know that many long serving family residents rely solely on their rainwater tanks and cannot afford a robust private water supply. Those families can spend thousands of dollars over a long drought to purchase water from

water carters, who charge around \$280 per load often with a wait of several weeks during peak periods. This causes hardship for these long term family residents, and gives them almost no capacity to defend a fire.

The WVA suggests that Council, with financial support from state government, consider a “win-win” for everyone. This would require a heavy subsidy for connection fees for each property by putting a cap on the cost of each connection, and for residents to keep their private water supplies where they choose to do so, with the ability for each resident to switch over to town water whenever they may need it.

In order to be resilient, Wingello needs affordable pressurised water, fed by gravity from a large service reservoir located at the highest point in town, with the ability to only pay for what we choose to use.

4. Fire Breaks.

The fire on January 4 originated from the south east, following the collapse of a pyro-cumulous cloud to the south-east of the village. It literally “rained fire” in the forest, which was rapidly pushed into the village by a strong southerly change. This is unusual, because previous fire behaviour originated from the west and north-west.

The village would definitely be more resilient if a wide fire break was constructed around the village. With the co-operation of a number of landowners and government agencies, now is the time to consider a wide firebreak around the village, which would need to be maintained in order to prevent regrowth. We appreciate that engaging with landowners, Forestry Corporation, the Crown and other government agencies is complex. We ask that this process be driven by Council and State government.

5. Tree Management on Private Land

Many residents are annoyed about what appears to be obstructive and unhelpful process within Council in order to gain approval to remove a tree. Furthermore, when permission is gained to remove a tree, residents on property less than 4000 m² cannot burn them in favourable weather conditions due to backyard burning laws. Whilst these laws may have a place in developed urban areas, they are impractical in a semi-rural village area.

Would Council please consider ways to be more helpful to residents who wish to responsibly manage their vegetation?

6. Village Centre Beautification

We thank Council for the recent allocation of \$50,000 from the Federal Government to improve Casburn Park. Whilst this will assist in restoring community pride, with respect, much more must be done. We seek Council’s ongoing support to improve the look and function of our village centre. As a minimum, please consider funding to tidy up the road verge outside the park, with a footpath and with decorative planter boxes etc. Please also consider re-establishing the native gardens opposite the shop and adjacent to the railway line.

Whilst we are grateful for the new ramps to the hall and the installation of stop signs, all levels of government have largely ignored requests to improve the safety and function of the village centre. One of the most urgent needs is for a safe pedestrian access across Railway Parade and the railway line. We have been continually frustrated by all levels of government, who have

offloaded the responsibility to each other without any progress on an important safety issue. A few years ago, we watched as millions of dollars was spent on safe pedestrian railway crossings at Bowral St Bowral, Yarrowa Rd Moss Vale, and at Robertson. Sadly, there was no investment in Wingello.

Please invest in our village centre, which will assist in restoring community safety and community pride.

I trust that this submission will be considered in the spirit of building a more resilient community. Would you please respond to us prior to the community meeting scheduled for Saturday 22 February? Please also advise us if you can attend.

We look forward to the input and commitment from State and Local government, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,



Mike Brearley
Infrastructure Spokesperson
Wingello Village Association

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Copy to: General Manager, Mayor & Councillors, Wingecarribee Shire Council

Attachment: Photographs of fallen tree on Highland Way immediately north of Wingello on Sunday 2 February 2020 and subsequent removal by Wingello Rural Fire Brigade



Photographs of fallen tree on Highland Way immediately north of Wingello on Sunday 2 February 2020 and subsequent removal by Wingello Rural Fire Brigade

