

Greens NSW

Bush Fire Risk Management Policy



Principles

1. Assumptions about traditional European bush fire prevention, mitigation, control and management need review in the light of the need for ecologically sustainable management.
2. There is an urgent need to correct the common misconception that responsible fire management always involves burning or clearing to reduce moderate and high fuel loads generally throughout the landscape, irrespective of where they occur. Rather, such activities should be strategically planned, to protect the community and vulnerable assets whilst minimising the adverse impacts of these activities on the environment.
3. Stricter controls are required to drastically reduce the amount of rural burning not required for essential asset protection.
4. Prescribed burning is only one method of fuel management and should be considered in the context of other available options and the management objectives of the land in question.
5. Many vegetation communities and plants cannot survive frequent fire; for this reason frequent fire has been listed as a key threatening process by the NSW Scientific Committee under the Threatened Species Conservation Act.
6. Further, many vegetation communities can undergo severe decline in biodiversity with long term fire exclusion. Ecologically appropriate fire regimes are required to maintain biodiversity and functioning ecosystems.
7. Firefighting services in NSW need support, supplementation and additional resources. In particular, local government needs to be provided with additional resources and finances to enable the proper implementation of its responsibilities with regard to the assessment and implementation of hazard reduction strategies.
8. Education of councils, land managers, land-holders, the general public, fire management planners and fire fighters is needed and should be publicly funded. Such education should target specific audiences and address a broad range of 'bush fire' and environmental issues.
9. Education and community awareness material needs to focus especially on the threat to the environment and property of inappropriate use of fire, particularly burning which is too frequent, extensive in area, of excessive intensity, badly timed or carelessly implemented.

10. All Fire Fighting Agencies and Land Managers should be issued with guidelines as to the specific implications of the legal requirement for ecologically sustainable fire management and receive training on the environmental effects of bush fires.
11. Basic training courses for Fire Permit officers, Brigade Captains and Brigade members should include specific information on the environmental impacts of frequent burning, appropriate fire regimes for biodiversity protection in different vegetation communities, guidelines regarding the timing of burns, the manner in which burns are lit, maintained and contained, appropriate fire exclusion areas and buffer zones, and other requirements of the local Bush Fire Risk Management Plans.
12. Local Bush Fire Management Committees should prepare summaries of landholder obligations under Risk Management Plans, including environmental assessment and protection requirements, for general circulation in the district.
13. High bush fire hazard areas are usually those associated with natural areas and vegetation. The location of residential or rural residential areas in high bush fire hazard areas increases the level of native vegetation loss as well as increasing the level of threat to people and their homes from the risk of a bush fire. This is neither economically, socially nor ecologically sustainable. New development that requires the clearing of native vegetation on adjoining properties should not be permitted in identified Bushfire Prone Areas, where such development is likely to put lives or property in danger or involve substantial protection and suppression costs including loss of environmental values.

Goals

The Greens NSW will work to support:

14. The need for Fire Permits to be obtained at all times of the year when there is a significant risk of fire escape, not just during the Bushfire Danger Period throughout NSW;
15. The payment of compensation to volunteer members of the RFS for loss of salaries and recreational opportunities during extended fire fighting activities;
16. The use of emergency powers under the Rural Fires Act 1997 where there are serious threats to human life, property as well as the environment;
17. The carrying out of adequate environmental assessment on all activities or works proposed to be undertaken in accordance with a bush fire risk management plan;
18. Accurate mapping of all proposed and actual fires on a standardised Geographic Information System with additional data collected with respect to intensity, height of burn, slope, etc;

19. The use of plans of operations to determine both the environmental impact and alternative fire suppression strategies (i.e. firefighting aircraft) for bush fire operations in natural areas, and in particular in wilderness areas and in the National Park estate;
20. Public education and prevention strategies to minimise the occurrence of bush fires, maximise community preparedness and assist the effective and integrated mitigation of bush fire risk within the principles of ESD; and
21. Encouragement of provisions in council LEPs to protect native bushland by prohibiting urban development which requires clearing of native vegetation for fire mitigation purposes.

Detail

The Greens NSW will work towards:

22. When applying the guidelines for development in bush fire prone areas under the Australian Standard Planning for Bushfire Protection assessments must ensure that the requirement to clear vegetation is kept to a minimum where alternative engineering solutions will provide the required fire protection;
23. The establishment of an ongoing research program into the ecological effects of bush fire, with the objective of ensuring that fire management programs are compatible with ecological sustainability and the maintenance of biodiversity;
24. The clarification of responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of all volunteer fire fighters within the State and the subjection of all practices to WorkCover inspections;
25. Clarifying the demarcations and ensuring optimum cooperation between the RFS and the NSWFB by developing a model which clearly outlines the roles of the respective organizations, focussing on providing the best fire protection to the community and environment of NSW depending on the resources and capabilities of each of the agencies; and
26. Ensuring that all bush fire hazard management works proposed under bush fire management plans are prepared using the best available data, are available for public comment, and are adequately assessed to ensure that proposed works and prescriptions are ecologically sustainable and appropriate for implementation with an appropriate audit and compliance program.

The Greens NSW will support funding priorities which ensure:

27. The provision of adequate funding for the development and implementation of statewide community and school based education programs in the prevention of fires (particularly bush fires);

28. The provision of funding for research into arson, anti-arson education and early intervention programs;
29. That all NSWFB and RFS brigades are provided with adequate and appropriate protective clothing, training, equipment, appliances and communications systems;
30. The provision of adequate training in ecological principles and effective bush fire management to all firefighting personnel;
31. Improving lines and means of communications and coordination between all branches of emergency services; and
32. Proper funding of training and equipment for all fire fighting authorities.

The Greens will seek a review of legislation to:

33. Encourage the Commonwealth Government to amend radio broadcast laws to enable emergency services to break into radio programs during times of bush fire emergency, to broadcast warnings and other essential information;
34. Progressively remove the need for ongoing Council contributions to the funding of fire services; and
35. Provide a single Fire Service under a single Act of Parliament, amalgamating the NSWFB and Rural Fire Services and comprising permanent and volunteer Brigades.