



POSITION PAPER

BUSHFIRE HAZARD REDUCTION BURNING

BACKGROUND

Bushfires in NSW are inevitable across all fire-prone vegetation types. When high fuel loads, ignition sources and adverse weather inevitably coincide, wildfires will result. Modern fire management requires the assessment, measurement and mitigation of risks – to social, economic and environmental values. This creates an imperative to work closely with adjoining land managers, community groups and fire authorities to continually improve our understanding of bushfires, and to work together in managing the risks associated with living in a fire-prone environment. As the removal of hazards (fuel) is one of the key tools for reducing fire risks to both communities and environmental values, managing the risks associated with wildfires will entail improving community understanding and acceptance of the need to use prescribed fire (bushfire hazard reduction/cool burning) appropriately on private and public lands.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that there will always be a high residual risk in some areas on days of catastrophic fire weather and that prescribed burning only temporarily reduces fuel loads.

Fire is an unusual disturbance in that it can be both a threat and a requirement for maintaining species richness in many ecosystems. When managing species and ecosystems, long periods of time between bushfires can be detrimental, just as high fire frequency can be harmful. Using prescribed fire appropriately (selecting the correct fire regime for the correct vegetation community) is therefore an important factor for land managers.

Periods of extreme fire danger are recurring natural events in NSW. They are certain to continue and are likely to be exacerbated by the effects of climate change over the next 10 years and beyond.

Aboriginal “fire-stick farming” (anthropogenic burning) increases biodiversity and prevents habitat loss at the local scale.

NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

The Trust supports the use of bushfire hazard reduction (cool) burning as a key tool for reducing fire risks but acknowledges that there will always be a high residual risk in some areas on days of catastrophic fire weather and that prescribed burning only temporarily reduces fuel loads.

The Trust recognizes that global climate change is increasing temperatures, reducing humidity and causing more extreme and more frequent days of catastrophic and extreme fire danger. Consequently the Trust supports moves to reach a greenhouse gas pollution reduction target of at least 65% by 2030.

The National Trust works in conjunction with the Rural Fire Service to undertake bushfire hazard reduction on its own properties and in its Bush Management Program.

Aboriginal cultural burning, (“fire-stick farming” or anthropogenic burning) has been found to increase biodiversity and prevents habitat loss at the local scale. It does not eliminate mature habitat, but rather prevents its localized extinction from large-scale fires.

ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST’S POSITION

The Trust will publicise its position on bushfire hazard reduction burning and act to support moves to reach a greenhouse gas pollution reduction target of at least 65% by 2030. The Trust supports investigations and trialing of Aboriginal Cultural Burning (“fire-stick farming” or anthropogenic burning) and appropriate training by aboriginal practitioners.

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