



POSITION PAPER

FIRE HAZARD REDUCTION OF NATIVE VEGETATION IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

NATIONAL TRUST INVOLVEMENT

Since 1976 the National Trust has been undertaking bushland restoration at its own properties and on a contract basis for State and local government authorities, corporations and private landowners. Fire hazard reduction has been an integral element of the process and the National Trust has often worked with the Rural Fire Service and local fire brigades on prescribed burns and fuel reduction measures. The Trust has always maintained that effective hazard reduction to protect life and property and sound bushland management are consistent objectives.

In 1994 the Trust made a submission to the NSW State Cabinet Inquiry into Bushfire Management and Control and noted that in the aftermath of recent fires there had been considerable opportunism, with people removing trees for views in the guise of fire hazard reduction. It was also stated that there needed to be proper assessment of the fire hazard posed by trees and vegetation adjoining property as opposed to the benefits of trees shielding houses and firefighters from embers and tree species which may act as fire retardants.

The National Trust has also undertaken urban tree studies in suburban Sydney and regional NSW and has lobbied strongly for the recognition and conservation of urban bushland and particularly rare and endangered ecological communities in urban areas, including privately owned lands. The Trust also lists trees of heritage significance on the National Trust Register.

THE THREAT POSED TO URBAN TREES AND BUSHLAND

The 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule put in place by the NSW Rural Fire Service is having a major adverse impact on the conservation of significant remnant trees, urban bushland, endangered ecological communities, native fauna habitat and remnant rainforest communities. The Rule has been put in place with no proper scientific basis and no local council or community consultation. It appears to override long standing Council Tree Preservation Orders, Urban Bushland, Wetland and Littoral Rainforest State Environmental Planning Policies and Endangered Species Legislation.

NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

- The Trust believes that the full impacts of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule have not been properly assessed by the Rural Fire Service
- The Trust understands that the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule is facilitating clearing for views and to improve property redevelopment potential at the expense of urban landscape values.
- The Trust has been advised that the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule is having a major adverse impact on the conservation of significant remnant trees, urban bushland, endangered ecological communities, native fauna habitat and remnant rainforest communities.
- The Trust seeks a full inquiry into the impacts of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule, above and beyond the current review by the NSW Rural Fire Service. This inquiry should be undertaken by appropriately qualified individuals with expertise in vegetation management, threatened species conservation, risk management as well as fire protection and have regard to a broad range of values not simply fire protection.

ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST'S POSITION

The Trust will be making a submission to the NSW Rural Fire Service Review of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule expressing deep concern at the adverse impacts of the Rule on the conservation of significant remnant trees, urban bushland, endangered ecological communities, native fauna habitat and remnant rainforest communities. The Trust will be publicising its position to enable Councils and the community to better understand the full impacts of the Rule and to lobby their local members of Parliament on this issue. The Trust will continue to monitor and publicise the impacts of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Rule and will lobby for an independent, scientifically based inquiry on this issue.