



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

ABN 38 686 119 087

PO Box 29 Wentworth Falls NSW 2782

Phone: (02) 4757 1872

E-Mail: bmcs@bluemountains.org.au Web Site: www.bluemountains.org.au

Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

30 September 2020

Mr Chris Van der Kley
Chair
Blue Mountains Bush Fire Management Committee
Rural Fire Service
Katoomba 2780

Email: bluemountains@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Van der Kley,

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society (the Society) is a community-based volunteer organisation with over 800 members. Our mission is to help protect, conserve and advocate for the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains. We are writing about planning for prescribed burning following 2019-20 bushfires and the adoption of recommendations from the NSW Bushfires inquiry report.

Prescribed burning post the 2019-20 Bushfires

The extent and severity of the 2019 20 bushfires in the Blue Mountains has left the national parks estate and adjoining vegetated land with considerably more heavily burnt land than previous fires. BMCS in its submission to the NSW bushfire Inquiry said that “The unburnt areas must be now protected, both within and near the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWA). The unburnt 25 percent of these national parks are now even more precious as they are habitat for surviving fauna, a seed bank to restore plants and a refuge for wildlife.”

The NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry stated that

“Future hazard reduction must consider the extent of the 2019-20 bush fires. Previous hazard reduction activities have focussed on creating a mosaic pattern of different fuel ages and levels across the State. However, the extent of the 2019-20 fires has largely ‘reset’ the landscape in the fire affected areas which makes future hazard reduction more challenging. For example, areas adjacent to heavily burnt areas are likely to have become wildlife refugia, and therefore the environmental impacts of burning these areas is greater.” [Section 4.4.2.3.2]

Following the release of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry's findings, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW said: "These fires demonstrated the need for fire planners to value and protect environmental assets like koala forest habitat in the same way they do houses and other infrastructure. ... Unburnt patches of forest are critical for wildlife that have fled fires and should be protected at all costs ... Under current arrangements they have no special status...." [NCC media release 26 August 2020]

The problem now facing agencies as we move into prescribed burnings and the 2020-21 fire season is how to protect and support the recovery of the biodiversity of national parks. For instance, unburnt areas may be critical habitat for wildlife populations that have been severely depleted in adjacent burnt areas and the successful recovery of many plants depends on how frequently they are burnt. The Society is concerned about how this balance will be struck. We would like to know what is the process to take habitat protection into account in planning for future prescribed burning and in selecting burn locations in areas which have experienced extensive wildfire already.

As well, given the Premier announced that the NSW government accepted all the recommendations of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, when and how will the implementation of the recommendations occur in relation to bushfire management in the Blue Mountains region? Have areas earmarked for prescribed burning been reviewed or are going to be reviewed in the light of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry recommendations? Has this review included re-evaluating these priority areas as some of these priorities can stay in a forward plan for some years before conditions are favourable?

We understand that burning programs are developed, approved and implemented by District Bush Fire Management Committees with various agencies working co-operatively. It is self-evident that programs approved before the impacts of the 2019-20 fires should now be reviewed and priorities adjusted accordingly. Will the district committee give due regard to the ensuring ecological recovery?

Yours sincerely



Tara Cameron
President
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
mobile 0419 824 974 or email president@bluemountains.org.au

cc.

David Crust, Director, National Parks and Wildlife Service. Blue Mountains Region
Rosemary Dillon, General Manager, Blue Mountains City Council
Chris Gambian, Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservation Council of NSW