

BACKGROUND

The NSW Government has commissioned an independent expert inquiry into the 2019-20 bushfire season to provide input to NSW ahead of the next bushfire season.

The catastrophic bushfires which burnt swathes of eastern NSW, as well as parts of eastern Queensland and Victoria, provide a timely opportunity to reassess our approach to fire management, particularly in light of the devastating impacts to natural ecosystems and the important fauna and flora which rely on the landscapes where they occur.

NSW has led the way in planning and implementing fire management practices that consider life, property and the environment and we strongly uphold the view that management of vegetation for bush fire should continue to be ecologically sustainable while protecting life and property.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The NCC has focused its submission on the first three points within the Terms of Reference (ToR), which we consider the main points, listed below and included recommendations within each of these.

The Inquiry is to consider, and report to the Premier on, the following matters.

1. The causes of, and factors contributing to, the frequency, intensity, timing and location of, bushfires in NSW in the 2019-20 bushfire season, including consideration of any role of weather, drought, climate change, fuel loads and human activity.
2. The preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for bushfires in NSW, including current laws, practices and strategies, and building standards and their application and effect.
3. Responses to bushfires, particularly measures to control the spread of the fires and to protect life, property and the environment, including:
 - immediate management, including the issuing of public warnings
 - resourcing, coordination and deployment
 - equipment and communication systems.

The full Terms of Reference is available here: [Inquiry's Terms of Reference](#).

MAKE A SUBMISSION

This guide will help NCC members and supporters make a submission on the TOR

- You may use the dot points included to help you write your own submission.
- It is generally better to personalise your submission. You are encouraged to use your own words as much as possible and include your own local experiences and concerns.
- You only need to address the issues that concern you or your organisation— a letter outlining key points is enough to get your message across.

SUGGESTED COMMENTS

- Future planning for bushfire risk management in NSW recognise that climate change is now a major driver of increased bushfire danger and that further increases in global temperature are likely to increase the length and severity of fire season, restrict the window of opportunity for safe and effective hazard reduction burning and increase the costs and the risk to the community from bushfire events across NSW.
- Government should recognise the body of scientific evidence that strongly specifies only very recently burned areas may reduce fire severity under extreme and catastrophic fire weather conditions. Under these conditions areas hazard reduced, particularly those treated over more than 1 year previously, are unlikely to provide substantial fire suppression benefits.
- Hazard reduction burning should be undertaken strategically, with clear objectives for burns that show measurable benefits in reducing risk to identified assets. Hazard reduction burning programs aimed at meeting area treated based targets are of little benefit.
- Asset Protection Zones identified in Bush Fire Risk Management Plans should be the focus for reducing fuel loads, rather than undertaking hazard reduction burning in natural areas located far from built assets. The width of APZs required for asset protection must be based on scientific evidence.
- There needs to be a comprehensive inventory of environmental assets, including the locations of threatened species and endangered ecological communities which are then included as environmental assets in Bush Fire Risk Management Plans. Treatments to reduce the risk to these assets must be identified where possible. The Plans must incorporate post fire restoration and rehabilitation guidelines, especially for threatened species, communities and refuge areas.
- There is no scientific evidence to show that grazing or logging will reduce fire risk and both can be devastating to threatened species such as koalas and damage natural processes. Government must ensure that neither is reintroduced into conservation areas.
- There are many strategies used in firefighting, the benefits and costs of each needs to be assessed to determine their effectiveness and what their detrimental outcomes for the environment are.
- With the increasing frequency of lighting ignitions in remote areas, various technologies and strategies for rapid extinguishing of these fires must be investigated, including an increase in the use of remote area firefighting teams.
- The Government must develop a State Fire Management Strategy in consultation with peak stakeholder groups including NCC that addresses fire response and recovery. The Government needs to commit to funding for these strategies which is not aligned to specific grant programs and has funding certainty.
- Following major bushfire events, post-fire environmental recovery actions are needed including targeted recovery for threatened species and communities which are listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered. Recovery actions must consider pest species, weeds, minimising erosion and sedimentation and maintaining water quality.

Public Submissions close Friday 17 April 2020

This can be extended for those directly affected by the fires

To make a submission:

- **Online form:** <https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/make-a-submission-to-the-bushfire-inquiry/>
- **Email:** inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au
- **Post:** NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry, GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001
- **Phone:** If you have limited computer or internet access you can make a submission over the phone by calling the Bushfire Customer Care program on 13 77 88
- **In-person:** at any [Service NSW service centre \(external link\)](#) or at a [Mobile Service Centre\(external link\)](#)