

Council Policy

Bush Fire Management

Policy Statement

This policy sets out Council's approach to effective risk and location based bush fire management throughout the Northern Beaches Local Government Area (LGA) in order to protect life and reduce the impact of bush fire on property, infrastructure and the environment.

Principles

Council is committed to:

- Undertaking pro-active measures to protect life and property from bush fires.
- Partnering and engaging with the community to support them in understanding bush fire risk, appropriately managing bush fire risk on their property, and increasing their resilience to future risk.
- Supporting emergency services in the prevention of, and the preparation, response and recovery for bush fire emergencies.
- Complying with all relevant legislation, standards, codes and plans including delivering Council's obligations under applicable Bush Fire Risk Management Plans, and the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC).
- Ensuring that future development appropriately incorporates bush fire protection and risk management requirements that are appropriate to their location.
- Planning for climate change impacts on bush fire behaviour using best available information in conjunction with the NSW Rural Fire Service.
- Ensuring environmental impacts associated with risk mitigation are appropriately considered, and avoided where it is safe to do so.

Policy Scope

This Policy applies to all employees, agents, officers, councillors, committee members, residents, workers and visitors of the Northern Beaches Council.

This policy applies to all land owned by Northern Beaches Council or for which Council has responsibility as land manager, and to all private land within Council's boundaries. The policy does not apply to National Parks, or Crown, State and Federal lands over which Council has no jurisdiction.

Land tenures within Council's boundary are outlined as per Figure 1 in Appendix 2.

Policy Application

Risk Management

All land managers have a responsibility to manage bush fire risk and provide an integrated and best practice approach to minimising the impact of bush fires on the community and the local environment. On the Northern Beaches, bush fire risk can arise from smoke, radiant heat, flame contact and/or ember attack (noting that ember attack is the risk that affects most properties in this area).

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Implement actions within the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (Risk Plan).
- Employing risk based decision-making using a holistic understanding of bush fire risk, including vegetation type, topography, data, vulnerability, capacity, and exposure.
- Prioritise efforts and resources to reduce risks that have the greatest potential impact, in consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service.
- Ensure Council's compliance with the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and all other relevant legislation, standards, codes and plans as listed in the 'References and Related Documents' below so as to minimise the risk posed by bush fire to the Northern Beaches community.
- Support the community in understanding the continual threat that bush fire risk will pose, and how they can implement appropriate risk management while continuing to meet environmental obligations.
- Work with stakeholders that neighbour Council land to reduce vulnerability to bush fire – this includes the collective responsibility of State and local government, landowners, industry and the community, and collaboration between those stakeholders.
- Incorporate forecasts of future changes in fire risk when planning, resourcing and managing bush fire on the Northern Beaches.

Fire Management

Council will work collaboratively with members of the BFMC to provide an integrated approach to bush fire management across the LGA in accordance with the Risk Plan, Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) Plan and reserve-specific Bush Fire Management Plans.

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Planning and preparation for bush fire management will be undertaken using all appropriate methods available to Council including but not limited to prescribed burning, maintenance of Asset Protection Zones (APZs), fuel load reductions and fire trail maintenance.
- Work with the BFMC to maintain the currency of the Risk Plan, FAFT Plan and Council Reserve Bush Fire Management Plans.
- Implement strategic fuel management works, including the preparation of control lines, so that Council and agencies, in particular the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) and Fire + Rescue NSW (FRNSW), can undertake prescribed burning in Council bushland reserves. This may include hazard reduction, ecological and cultural burns.

- Seek to integrate traditional & ecological burning practices and fire regimes into current practices particularly where it improves risk mitigation and environmental outcomes.
- In areas with existing development, Council will maintain APZs on Council land adjoining private properties in consultation with NSWRFs. In the absence of prescriptive APZ widths, those widths will be determined in consultation with the NSWRFs and/or Fire Management Plans that apply to the subject site.
- In areas of new development, Council will apply relevant State government guidelines/protocols to set APZ requirements and ensure appropriate APZs can be achieved on the land being developed.
- Maintain a network of designated service trails in Council bushland in accordance with the Risk Plan and FAFT Plan to ensure vehicular access for fire suppression and fire management purposes.
- Ensure bush fire hazard complaints are referred to the NSWRFs for review and determination, and implement and document any recommended actions in a timely manner.
- Assess the environmental impacts of proposed fuel management works prior to undertaking the works in accordance with the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code for New South Wales, or other relevant approval pathway.
- Ensure that burn planning considers potential impacts on flora and fauna and that impacts are minimised by implementing on-site mitigation measures.
- Integrate Council's bush regeneration program and Bushcare volunteer program in a manner supportive of fuel management objectives.
- Private land holders wishing to implement strategic fuel management works including vegetation removal, burning etc, shall ensure compliance with the requirements of appropriate regulatory authorities including but not limited to the NSWRFs, FRNSW, NSW Environment Protection Authority, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (or their successors) and/or Council.

Community Engagement

The safest action to protect life is for people to avoid the risk. An engaged community is crucial to ensuring they are informed and actively involved in preparedness and responses to bush fire risk.

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Work with the BFMC and our partners and neighbours to ensure the community understands bush fire threat. This includes facilitating community engagement in bush fire prone areas on bush fire mitigation and management so that responsibility for bush fire management is acknowledged and appropriately shared through governments, agencies, industries and individuals taking individual and combined actions.
- Working with our BFMC partners, facilitate residents' preparation for bush fire. Residents who choose to live in bush fire prone areas must have a bushfire survival plan and employ a range of management measures to reduce the bush fire risk on their property.
- Increase and improve the resilience of our community by supporting and facilitating prevention, preparation, response and recovery activities for bush fire hazards as

outlined in the *State Emergency & Rescue Management Act, 1989* and associated State and Local Emergency Management Plans.

- Ensure that preparation and adoption of any revisions to the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Prone Land Map includes community engagement and communication.

Land Use Planning

The most important objective for strategic planning regarding bush fire management is to identify whether new development is appropriate subject to the identified bush fire risk on a landscape scale, as identified in NSW Rural Fire Service's *Planning for Bush Fire Protection: a guide for council, planners, fire authorities and developers, November 2019 (Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019)*. This policy places a strong emphasis on strategic bush fire planning having regard to economic, social and environmental matters.

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Consistent consideration of *Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019*
- Consider and be consistent with Council's Community Strategic Plan and Local Strategic Planning Statement and with all other relevant strategic planning policies (such as existing and forthcoming Local Environment Plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs)).
- Reduce risk and increase resilience through effective land-use planning and building controls, supported by legislation, policy, guidance material and expert advice.
- Development applications for properties at risk from bush fire will provide for and accommodate adequate bush fire protection measures. Council bushland shall not be made available to accommodate bush fire risk associated with new development.
- Council's LEPs and DCPs appropriately manage bush fire evacuation risk by considering whether future development will result in an increase in people/properties at risk and/or an increase in the vulnerability of existing communities.
- Consistently review and update the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Prone Land Map. The latest Bush Fire Prone Land Map was certified on the 7th August 2020 and will be reviewed every 5 years.
- Ensure that biodiversity data and mapping is integrated with bush fire management practices to avoid and minimise impacts on flora and fauna wherever possible.

References and related documents

Related Legislation

- [Rural Fires Act 1997](#)
- [Rural Fires Regulation 2013](#)
- [Local Government Act 1993](#) and associated regulations
- [Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016](#)
- [Biodiversity Conservation Regulation 2017](#)
- [Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979](#)

- [Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997](#)
- [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#)

Related Policies (Council & Internal)

- [Draft Bushland & Biodiversity Policy 2020](#)
- [Shape 2028 Northern Beaches Community Strategic Plan 2018 – 2028](#)
- [Protect. Create. Live. Northern Beaches Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2040](#)

Related Documents

- [Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020](#)
- [Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, Draft Propositions, Counsel Assisting, 31 August 2020](#)
- [Warringah Pittwater Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2010](#)
- [Manly, Mosman, North Sydney Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2010](#)
- [Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code for New South Wales 2006](#)
- [10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice for New South Wales 2015](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Planning for Bush Fire Protection: A guide for councils, planners, fire authorities and developers, November 2019](#)
- [Northern Beaches Bush Fire Prone Land Map 2020](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Standards for Asset Protection Zones](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Standards for Low Intensity Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Burning](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Standards for Pile Burning](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Bush Fire Survival Plan](#)

Definitions

Definitions relevant to this policy are included as an attachment in Appendix 1.

Responsible Officer

Executive Manager, Environment and Climate Change

Review Date

30 October 2025

Revision History

Revision	Date	Change	TRIM #
1	20/10/2020	Draft Bush Fire Management Policy for public exhibition	2020/536391

Appendix 1 – Definitions

Asset Protection Zone (APZ): is a fuel reduced area surrounding a built asset or structure. This is primarily concerned with protecting both public and private assets such as schools, hospitals, community centres, retirement villages and residential dwellings, but may extend to other assets or infrastructure.

An APZ provides:

- a buffer zone between a bush fire hazard and an asset;
- an area of reduced bush fire fuel that allows suppression of fire;
- an area from which backburning may be conducted; and
- an area which allows emergency services access and provides a relatively safe area for firefighters and home owners to defend their property.

For existing development an APZ, its size and management will be defined in consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service, Bush Fire Risk Management Plan, and/or Fire Management Plans that apply to the land. For new development an APZ will be defined by *Planning for Bush Fire Protection (NSWRFS, 2019)*.

Potential bush fire fuels should be minimised within an APZ. This is so that the vegetation within the planned zone does not provide a path for the transfer of fire to the asset either from the ground level or through the tree canopy.

Bush Fire Risk Management Committee (BFMC) & Fuel Management Sub-Committee: Under the Rural Fires Act 1997 the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC) must constitute a Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) for each area in the State that is subject to the risk of bush fires. The BFMC provides a forum for cooperative and coordinated bush fire management in a local area. BFMCs are responsible for preparing, coordinating, reviewing and monitoring the Plan of Operations, Risk Plan and FAFT for their area.

The Fuel Management Sub-Committee, which is comprised of the BFMC member organisations that are responsible for managing land, has been formed specifically to coordinate the details of fuel management works within the district.

Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (Risk Plan): Is a strategic document that identifies community assets at risk and sets out a five-year program of coordinated multi-agency treatments to reduce the risk of bush fire to the assets. Treatments may include such things as hazard reduction burning, grazing, community education, fire trail maintenance and establishing community fireguard groups. Each BFMC is required to prepare and submit to the BFCC a draft Risk Plan for approval. Each Risk Plan is reviewed every 5 years.

Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan (FAFT): The aim of the FAFT is to provide appropriate means of accessing land to prevent, fight, manage or contain bush fires. The document identifies a suitable network of fire trails across a BFMC area, which includes both existing and proposed fire trails and access points. Each BFMC is required to prepare and submit to the BFCC a draft FAFT for approval. Each FAFT is reviewed every 5 years.

Fire Management Plan: Council from time to time creates detailed fire management plans for individual reserves that assist in determining burn programs, asset protection zone configurations and the like. They can be a useful tool in integrating many of the site specific requirements that need to be considered when managing bush fire risk at a local scale.

Bush Fire Prone Land Map: It is a requirement under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* that a map be produced for each Local Government Area to which a Risk Plan applies recording all land within the area designated by the Commissioner of NSW RFS that is bush fire prone land.

An area identified as bush fire prone land is land that can support a bush fire or is likely to be subject to bush fire attack. Special construction standards and development restrictions apply to areas mapped as bush fire prone land in NSW. Each Bush Fire Prone Land Map is reviewed every 5 years.

Appendix 2 – Land Tenure

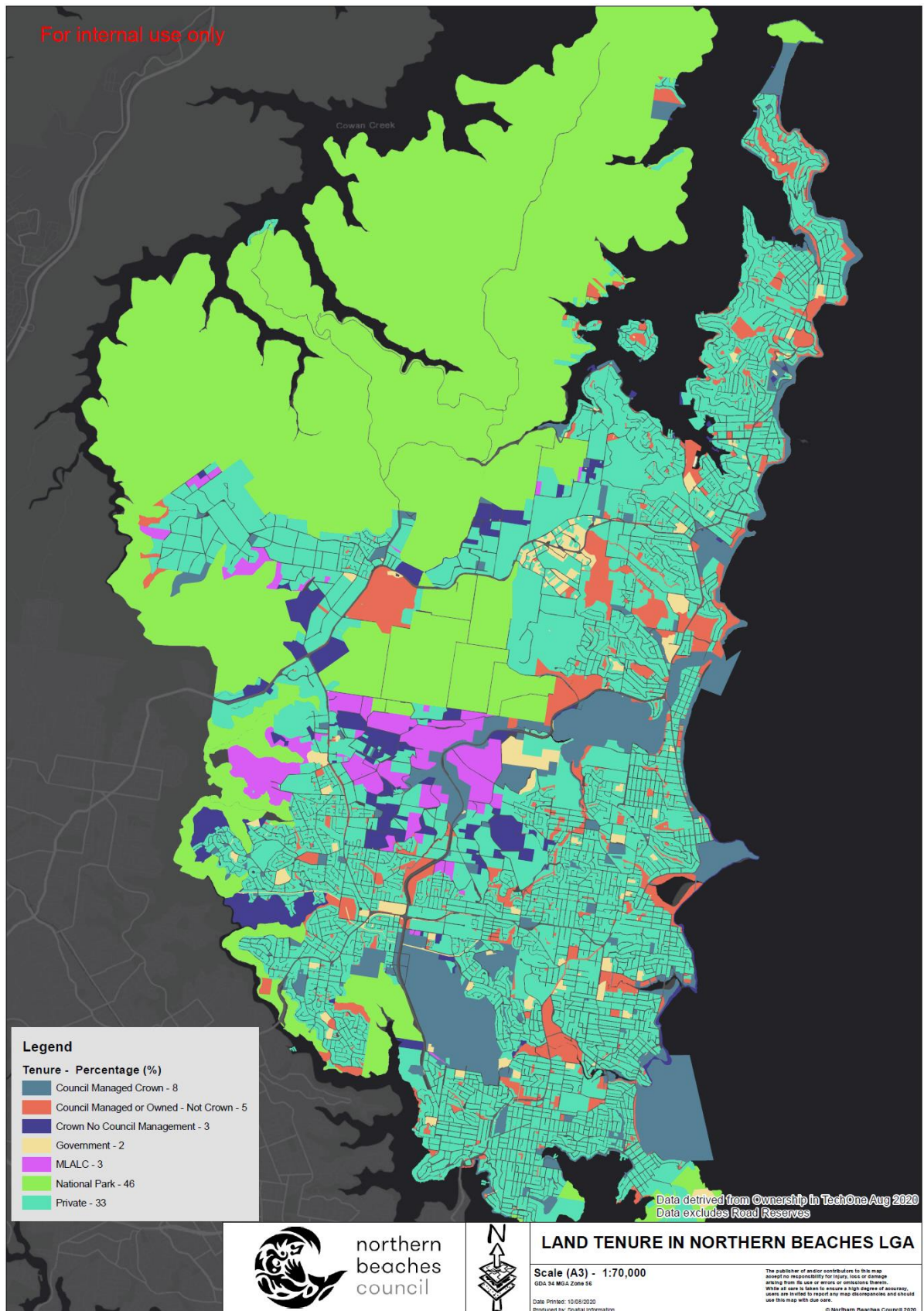


Figure 1 Land tenure breakdown throughout the Northern Beaches Local Government Area