

THE RE-EVALUATION OF THE BUSH FIRE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CODE

[ENHANCING HAZARD REDUCTION IN NEW SOUTH WALES](#)

Case Study 3

Tonkiss Street Tuggerah, Special Fire Advantage Zone (SFAZ) on the Central Coast of NSW

This is part of the Submission sent to:

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by David Holland

B.A.S Env. Planning.: Grad. Dip. Env. Management

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When visiting the site, one becomes immediately aware of the closeness of the hill to the south of the subdivision at the rear of houses in Gretel Court. The incline of the hill started at the edge of the 30 meter APZ and rose at about 45 degrees. The trees were about 50 meters high starting from the toe of the hill to the ridge about 120 meters higher than the back fence of the houses. The hillside had been HR burnt recently. The regrowth was predominantly native sedges or grasses. Some weed species, including Lantana, had established themselves on the slopes of the hill. This was probably caused by the current Hazard Reduction (HR) fire regime, where weed species tend to outgrow natives if present after fires.

The assessment of the site is that the APZ is not adequate for the proper protection of the housing development. The houses should not have been built so close to the hill.

The vegetation on the hillside has been degraded by successive HR fires, so much that if this practice were to continue in the area of the SFAZ as described in the RMP SFAZ map (appendix 1), it would not reduce the biodiversity in the short term.

It is worth noting that in the long term, any regeneration of the eucalypts present on the hillside would be impossible under the SFAZ HR fire regime. In time these trees will die out and the steep slope of the hill may tend to be susceptible to land slip and erosion, with no roots to hold the soil in place. This will mean a plan must be developed in the long term to include both land management and Fire Risk management on the hillside. If no land management actions are commenced by the time the trees start to die, a manual planting program of locally indigenous trees will have to be implemented to ensure the integrity of the hillside.

However, as the trees are at present relatively young this eventuality will not be likely for some years, although eventually other alternative to the SFAZ may be required to help reduce risk of fire to the houses.

The SFAZ is bounded by trails except on the north side, which seems to be bounded by an electricity high voltage easement.

This SFAZ is an acceptable short and medium term fire management measure, provided as part of the HR burn; maintenance was done on the area of the SFAZ by removing any weed species manually before the burn.

Long term however, proper assessment of environmental effects should be made and appropriate long term plans should be put in place to mitigate these effects as described above.

Conclusion

Fire has proven to be less likely to run up slopes and therefore the need for a SFAZ may not be as critical if some management program was implemented to enable the APZ to better protect the housing development. This could be done by reducing the density and height of trees on the bottom of the slope. This would enable the area to be managed in a more sustainable way for both fire protection and land management.

Again, in any HR burn on this SFAZ, the benefits of the burn will only last about half the period of the fire frequency interval. Any SFAZ, including this one, should not have a fire frequency interval prescribed less than the interval for a LMZ in appendix A of the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code.