

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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Established 1991

(Weston Creek Citizens Council Inc. – Reg. No. A2637)

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ACT Planning and Land Authority
Interim Bushfire Mitigation Guidelines
GPO Box 1908
CANBERRA ACT 2601

To Whom this may concern

Planning for Mitigation of Bushfire Risk

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the public consultation process on the Interim Guideline on Planning for Bushfire Risk Mitigation.

The WCCC has been actively involved in Weston Creek as a consultation conduit for the local community since 1991. The WCCC is a non-political, voluntary lobby group representing the residents of Weston Creek and is an informed, active and pragmatic contributor to public debates in Weston Creek. Our website (www.wccc.com.au) has further details about the WCCC.

As the Weston Creek community found to its great cost in January 2003, some of the areas with the greatest bushfire risks are to be found in existing suburbs. Our community's main concern about the Guideline is that it only recommends voluntary measures in existing suburbs. We believe that much more needs to be done by ACT Government agencies like the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA), Environment ACT and the ACT Emergency Services Authority to mitigate bushfire risk in existing Canberra suburbs, and that all Government agencies should combine their efforts to maximize the outcomes.

We agree with the Interim Guideline's principle that bushfire risk reduction is a responsibility that should be shared between Government agencies and the Canberra community. However, history shows that community and Government fears about events like the January 2003 bushfire being repeated diminish over time, and so does community and Government preparedness. We therefore argue that more stringent measures need to be taken in existing suburbs to reduce the risk of bushfire impact.

As an example, we propose that ACTPLA should regulate to allow for steel sheeting fences (e.g. 'Colorbond') to be built at the back of properties adjoining reserves and parkland where a bushfire risk exists. Further, we suggest that ACTPLA and Environment ACT should be actively involved in encouraging the construction of such fences. While there will be some who will regard such a move as aesthetically unacceptable, we argue that protecting lives and property from bushfire should be considered as having the greatest priority.

We also recommend that Bushfire Risk Assessments be undertaken for all existing suburbs with the intention that risk reduction measures will be implemented by the appropriate Government agencies wherever possible. These assessments should not only be made public, but they should be part of proactive campaigns to educate residents about specific risks in their areas, and what actions residents can take to minimize them. Education campaigns also need to occur on a regular basis in order to overcome community complacency.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Jeff Carl
Chairperson
Weston Creek Community Council