

ECOTOURISM

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

February 2019

Fact sheet 1

The aim of this factsheet is to clarify the policy position of the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) in relation to the requirements of ecotourism developments in bush fire prone areas.

Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible accommodation located in natural areas that is environmentally sustainable. It typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Due to the focus of a minimal impact to the natural environment, conflicts often arise between the principles of ecotourism and bush fire mitigation measures.

Because of the nature of the use, ecotourist facilities are often located in isolated areas. Occupants and firefighters may have to travel large distances through bush fire prone vegetation. In addition, the isolation may mean that if a fire impacts on the development, occupants may also be a long way from firefighting assistance.

The NSW RFS has reviewed requirements for ecotourism developments and aims to provide greater advice for alternate solutions where the maximum number of occupants exceeds 12 persons.

As such the provisions within this factsheet can be considered as a way to set out parameters for meeting the aims and objectives for an ecotourist facility within *Planning for Bush Fire Protection* (PBP 2006).

Due to the subjective nature of performance-based design and compliance, a bush fire design brief should be undertaken, in accordance with the fire engineering design brief process in the *International Fire Engineering Guidelines* (2005 edition, ABCB), for situations that do not comply with the literal requirements of PBP 2006. This can be undertaken on a situation specific basis or for repeatable situations by technical policy.

The NSW RFS considers an ecotourist facility to be Tourist Accommodation for the purposes of s100b of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

Due to the environmental constraints inherent in ecotourism developments, special emphasis needs to be given to emergency planning and management, and the provision of onsite sheltering as a last resort.

An applicant must recognise that the survivability of structures in a bush fire event has been forsaken to meet the minimum environmental footprints and other constraints of these types of developments.

An applicant should flag this with their insurers and accept the prospect of significant structural loss within the development.

Emergency management plans addressing evacuation planning and closure during extreme and catastrophic fire danger rating days needs to be provided. Refuge buildings are also to be provided for occupants of the ecotourist facility during a bush fire event and must be able to cater for all potential persons on the site. They must be constructed to a minimum Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) of BAL-12.5 in accordance with *Australian Standard (AS) 3959 'Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas' 2009*.

Sufficient Asset Protection Zones (APZs) will be required to ensure the refuge building/s will not experience a radiant heat level greater than 10kW/m² on any point of the building. Other buildings within the APZ should also be addressed (i.e. if they are within 10m of the refuge building(s), then the 10kW/m² should be measured from these buildings).

Note that there is significant responsibility and liability on the owner / manager of a site to ensure that the ongoing management of the facility and adherence to the emergency management plan is carried out. This emergency management planning is to be commensurate with the bush fire risk and occupancy levels.

As per Fast Fact 8/07, the NSW RFS does not endorse emergency management plans.

A development that adequately addresses the following parameters can be considered to meet the performance criteria for ecotourism development in PBP 2006:

- Emergency management planning shall be provided which complies with Section 4.2.7 of PBP 2006 and shall address the use/closure of the facility on extreme and catastrophic fire rating days;
- The identified refuge building/s are designed to accommodate all occupants of the facility;
- Any refuge building must comply with the occupancy levels permissible for that structure under the BCA;
- To ensure radiant heat levels of greater than 10kw/m² are not experienced at any external point of the building refuge buildings are provided with APZs in accordance with Table A2.6 of PBP 2006;
- The refuge building/s are designed and sited in accordance with the principles listed in PBP 2006 and constructed to a minimum BAL 12.5 of AS 3959;
- Vehicular access (internal access) is to be provided from a public road to the nominated refuge building and comply with the requirements of Section 4.2.7 of PBP;
- Pedestrian paths from cabins to the refuge building/s are to be provided and clearly signposted;
- APZs are provided wholly within the boundaries of the proposed development site (exceptional circumstances for the provision of APZ's on adjoining land may apply as per Section 3.3b PBP 2006).
- For proposals in isolated or remote areas which involve large travel distances through bush fire vegetation, the following matters should be addressed:
 - The traffic level likely to be generated during an emergency evacuation
 - The capacity of the broader road network to facilitate safe emergency evacuation
 - Limitations/constraints inherent in the road system
- Management of potential traffic conflicts (i.e. emergency vehicles vs evacuating members of the public)
- Water, electricity and gas supply to the nominated refuge building/s is to comply with the requirements of Section 4.2.7 of PBP 2006.
- A bush fire report of how the proposed development addresses the performance criteria outlined in section 4.2.7 of PBP 2006 must be provided. This is to include documentation that the bush fire design brief process was undertaken.
- For details of what is required in a Bush Fire Report for an alternate solution the NSW RFS provides a Practice Note - 1/07 on Submission Requirements. A qualified Bush Fire Consultant can assist with these.

Where developments have areas of unmanaged bush land, consideration must be given to planning for fire management across the property or on a landscape scale.

Where necessary, the NSW RFS may request a property Fire Management Plan (in conjunction with emergency management arrangements and access) as an appropriate way of demonstrating due diligence to preventing or slowing the spread of bush fire on or from the property.

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