

Jihad Dib

Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister for Youth Justice



Media Release

NSW Government removes roadblock for rural firefighters protecting communities

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The Minns Labor Government has made it easier for the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) to close roads in fire emergencies ahead of a dangerous bushfire season, with legislation passing through NSW Parliament this week.

The approval of the Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 removes a requirement for the RFS to seek permission from Transport for NSW to close roads. It will see a return to the previous arrangement when the RFS only needed permission for closures relating to rail corridors.

In a previous amendment to the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, made under the *Transport Administration Amendment (Transport Entities) Act 2017*, Transport for NSW was listed as a “rail authority” under the Act. This change widened the requirement for the RFS to seek permission for emergency road closures to roads not associated with the operation of railways, creating operational consequences.

Identifying whether a road was under the control of Transport for NSW was an additional and complicating factor for the RFS to manage in protecting communities from fires.

While the RFS will no longer need to seek permission before closing roads, it will need to notify Transport for NSW in a timely manner after a road is closed.

The change comes as NSW enters what is expected to be the most challenging bushfire season in years, with hot and dry conditions predicted for summer and several bush and grass fires already burning across the state.

Minister for Emergency Services Jihad Dib said:

“This is a sensible move that removes a burdensome requirement for the RFS, which has the very important job of keeping communities safe this summer.”

“We have already seen the early signs of a challenging fire season, with serious fires in the north and south of the state which have sadly resulted in the loss of three lives.”

“This bill removes a requirement that was, in the first place, an unintended consequence of a legislative change. It makes sense to change it back.”

“I am very proud of the work the more than 70,000 RFS volunteers do, and we are making sure they won’t be held up by an unnecessary administrative hurdle.”

MEDIA:

Emily Simpson | Minister Dib | 0438 342 966