



Michael Gallacher MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
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MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW GOVERNMENT MOVES TO PROTECT EMERGENCY WORKERS AND HOMEOWNERS FROM BUSH FIRE THREAT

Minister for Police and Emergency Services Michael Gallacher said the NSW Government is introducing laws that will streamline hazard reduction processes, strengthen offences and protect emergency service workers.

“The NSW Government wants to ensure our emergency services workers can do what they need to do to protect lives and property and will continue to remove any barriers that hinder or delay their responses,” Minister Gallacher said.

“The NSW Government will also remove obstacles for home owners to encourage them to responsibly manage fire risks on their properties.

“Under other changes to be introduced to Parliament today the Rural Fire Service will have the power to direct a Bush Fire Management Committee to amend its Bush Fire Risk Management Plan, if it’s considered to be inadequate.

“The changes also give the RFS Commissioner the power to carry out hazard reduction on land without the consent of the owner, after reasonable attempts to contact the landowner have failed.

“The NSW Government will boost penalties for anyone caught impersonating an emergency service worker, including where they seek to exercise a power of emergency personnel or intend to commit a criminal offence,” Minister Gallacher said.

“New laws will include two new offences for littering involving cigarettes and matches. An aggravated offence with a higher penalty will apply when littering occurs on days where a total fire ban is in place.

“The Bill also makes provisions to ensure police and enforcement officers can issue penalty notices for these offences which carry fines of \$330 and \$660 for the aggravated offence.

“This year’s bush fires have caused damage on a huge scale, particularly in the Blue Mountains where more than 200 homes were destroyed and another 120 damaged.

“We are also developing new rules which when commenced will allow homeowners in designated bush fire prone areas to clear trees near their homes to protect their property from bush fires, in an environmentally responsible way, without the requirement of an assessment or approval,” Mr Gallacher said.

Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Brad Hazzard said the proposed new rules, would come into force once the amendments were passed by the Parliament.

It would mean residents in designated bush fire prone areas will not need to seek permission to sensibly clear vegetation that is posing a fire risk from around their property.

When the new rules are implemented, home owners adjacent to and those in close proximity to bushland will not need to get permission to clear trees within 10 metres of their homes, on their own land. They will be able to clear undergrowth and shrubs within 50 metres of their homes, on their own land.

“This will need to be done in an environmentally responsible manner but our changes will ensure the rules regarding hazard reduction are based on protecting lives and property – people before trees is the priority,” Minister Hazzard said.

“We need to ensure the community is as prepared as it possibly can be for future bush fires and that authorities have the powers they need to conduct this essential work,” he said.

The NSW Government is doing its bit to reduce bush fire risks and we are on track to achieve our goal of increasing hazard reduction across NSW by 45 per cent by 2016.

Last financial year hazard reduction burns occurred on about 280,000 hectares of land – more than two-and-a-half times the amount carried out two years ago.

Government agencies are now working to put in place the relevant procedures and guidelines to implement legislative and policy changes.

ENDS

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