The aim of this Fact Sheet is to clarify the policy position of the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) in relation to the requirements for Places of Public Worship and assembly buildings on bush fire prone land.

A Place of Public Worship is a building or place used for the purpose of religious worship by a congregation or religious group, whether or not the building or place is also used for counselling, social events, instruction or religious training.

This Fact Sheet also applies to assembly buildings used for other congregational purposes.

Under the Rural Fires Act 1997 (RFA) buildings used as a place of public worship and other assembly buildings are not identified as being a Special Fire Protection Purpose Development (SFPP). A Bush Fire Safety Authority (BFSA) is not required under s100B of the RFA for buildings to be used for this purpose. However, they may be referred to the NSW RFS under section 79BA or 79C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A).

Clause 4.2.6 of Planning for Bush Fire Protection (PBP) states that Class 9 assembly areas under the BCA that are not a SFPP should:

- Be assessed under s79BA or 79C of the EP&A Act; and
- Be considered as if they were an SFPP and be assessed against the SFPP objectives listed in 4.2.3; and
- Consider the aims and objectives of PBP when assessing the merits of the proposal.

The NSW RFS recognises that Places of Public Worship and other assembly buildings can accommodate large numbers of persons of various physical capabilities. Given this, when considering such applications, an important component is whether there is adequate emergency management planning in place, commensurate with the risk.

In order to consider a Place of Public Worship or other assembly building under the provisions of 79BA of the EP&A, the following matters should be addressed:

- The aims and objectives of PBP;
- The specific objectives for SFPP Developments as set out under clause 4.2.3 of PBP;
- The capacity and training of staff and occupants to participate in a firefighting response;
- The performance criteria for asset protection zones for SFPP developments (table A2.6 of PBP);
- The capacity of the existing and proposed road network to facilitate emergency evacuation;
- Depending on the scale of the development, this may include consideration of the traffic impacts of emergency evacuation of the development in relation to;
  - the broader road network that may be affected;
  - the impact on the road system during the evacuation of the facility,
  - the traffic level likely to be generated during an emergency evacuation;
  - impacts of evacuation on approach and departure direction;
  - review of intersection performance;
  - review of limitations/constraints of affected area/road network system;
  - road access management during an evacuation.
- management of potential traffic conflicts (i.e. emergency vehicles versus evacuating members of the public).
Provision for non occupation on days of Extreme or Catastrophic Fire Danger, or other such conditions;

Emergency management planning commensurate with the risk.

Child care facilities within a place of public worship.

Of importance is that the bush fire protection measures, when applied in combination, ensure no increase to the level of residual risk currently being experienced by the community as a whole, in addition to providing safety to the occupants of the building.

Due to the subjective nature of performance-based design and compliance, a bush fire engineering brief should be undertaken in accordance with the fire engineering design brief process in the International Fire Engineering Guidelines (2005 edition, ABCB). This can be undertaken on a situation specific basis or for repeatable situations by technical policy.

Where a place of public worship or assembly building provides any function or use listed as a SFPP development in section 100B of the RFA, it will be required to obtain a BFSA.

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For further information regarding this document, please contact the NSW RFS Customer Service Centre on 1300 NSW RFS or 1300 679 737 or email csc@rfs.nsw.gov.au

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