MUSIC FESTIVALS THAT CATER FOR LARGE CROWDS IN BUSH FIRE PRONE AREAS

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The aim of this fact sheet is to clarify the position of the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) in relation to music festivals and other open air events that cater for large crowds when the event is located on bush fire prone land. Events that involve overnight camping and multiple days are of particular concern.

The following is a recommended framework for consideration by event organisers, consent authorities and emergency services in relation to the safe operation of such events from a bush fire perspective.

Such events may attract large numbers of patrons and can create a number of logistic and operational issues if evacuation is required due to a bush fire.

Crowd control and operational access at the venue during bush fire events can prove to be challenging especially if they are held in remote locations.

Preparation of the site to further reduce bush fire risk to patrons is paramount.

All of the following issues need to be addressed when assessing each individual site:

1. Whether the event is programmed during the gazetted bush fire danger period for the area or on days with an extreme or catastrophic fire danger rating. The NSW RFS would discourage any large festival event that would attract large numbers of patrons during the bush fire danger period.

2. Whether a bush fire assessment has been undertaken that identifies access and egress routes for both emergency services and patrons should the site need to be evacuated.

3. The provision of bulk water supplies specifically dedicated for firefighting purposes is to be provided.

4. Unobstructed Asset Protection Zones (APZ) of suitable width must surround the site along the boundaries adjacent to the bush fire threat. Slashing of grassed areas needs to occur in the lead up to the event and maintained during the event.

5. Emergency management must occur during the planning stage of event organisation and in consultation with the NSW RFS and all other relevant stakeholders.

6. Advance warning by event organisers is to be provided to patrons identifying that the event is located on bush fire prone land. Advice is to be prepared listing the precautions and requirements of patrons in the event of a bush fire event. Patrons should also be reminded that they will be required to comply with any fire restrictions. This could be undertaken at the time of sale of tickets.

7. Fires for cooking and heating will be in approved fire places only and should be addressed via a Fire Management Plan (e.g. operation and supervision of communal bonfire).

8. An emergency management and evacuation plan is to be provided that is acceptable to relevant stakeholders. This is to include crowd management and security and needs to be consistent with the NSW RFS document titled ‘A guide to developing a bush fire emergency management and evacuation plan’.
9. Provision of refuge building(s) on-site of suitable capacity for participants and staff that can meet the maximum radiant heat exposure of 10 kW/m². Alternatively an open air bush fire emergency assembly area of suitable size may be provided that complies with the requirements for Neighbourhood Safer Places.

10. A method of accounting for all people on site during an emergency (eg through gate monitoring and check-points) is to be provided.

In summary, this advice is provided to assist event organisers and approval authorities when assessing proposals for music festivals and other open air events that are likely to place large crowds in bush fire prone areas. Events must be referred to the NSW RFS under S79BA of the EP&A Act as there are no deemed to satisfy provisions that relate to these types of events.

It is the responsibility of the event organiser to take steps to ensure patron safety and provide a safe place and awareness of possible issues regarding the impact of bush fire.

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