



POLICY NO. 6/01

Section 63(4) of the Rural Fires Act 1997

Notified Steps for the Establishment and Maintenance of Planted Forests

Background

Section 63(4) provides for the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee to develop and advise persons of “notified steps” for areas or activities to which bushfire management activities apply. The provisions recognise the need to balance the protection of life, property, land and the environment.

The NSW plantation estate is currently in a period of expansion as a result of Government initiatives and subsequent interest from landowners. In 1994, the then NSW State Forests embarked on a plantation expansion program aimed at expanding the area of planted forests by 5-10,000 ha per year. Recent NSW Government initiatives such as the introduction of the *Plantations and Reafforestation Act 1999* are aimed at facilitating investment in planted forests.

Young forest plantations (e.g. eucalypt and pine) are highly susceptible to damage arising from bushfire. The potential loss in commercial terms can be very high unless bushfire management strategies are implemented to protect such assets. Because plantations may be established anywhere within the State, the current bushfire risk management planning process is not able to adequately address future planning for such plantations. Plantation establishment is regulated under the *Plantation and Reafforestation Act 1999*.

Bush Fire Risk Assessment

Bush Fire Hazard

For the first 5 years of the establishment of a plantation, the level of fuel and vegetation structure can be classified as being a MEDIUM HAZARD being similar to a Grassy Woodland.

After 5 years, the level of fuel and vegetation structure progresses similarly to a Dry Sclerophyll Forest, and can be classified as being a HIGH HAZARD.

Grazing is often used in conjunction with plantation establishment.

Asset Values

Plantations involve a significant, commercial investment and represent significant assets in local and regional economies that generate good potential to provide employment growth in timber harvesting and processing.

Threat Analysis

Applying the NSW Bush Fire Coordinating Committee's guidelines for bush fire risk assessment, the bushfire 'threat' to plantations is assessed as high, just as the fire 'threat' to other significant community assets within 100 metres of fire prone bush land is assessed as high.

Vulnerability Criteria

All young eucalypt and pine plantations are highly vulnerable to bushfires being fire sensitive and susceptible to damage from wildfire. A few of the most commonly planted species, such as Radiata Pine, Flooded Gum and Dunn's White Gum are fire sensitive throughout their commercial crop life.

Bush Fire Risk Evaluation

The high value hardwood and softwood plantation assets in NSW have values that are at significant risk from bush fire. All plantations are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of bushfire when young. All planted forests less than 10 years old should be viewed as a young plantation.

Because of the high asset value of plantations, both as capital investments and for their importance to future regional economy and employment, bushfires pose a moderate to major risk (depending on the size of individual plantations) to these "community assets". Those areas of less than 200 hectares (net planted area) are considered to be at moderate risk.

Plantations may also pose a risk to adjoining land-uses, particularly where those involve established habitable buildings (e.g. residences).

Notified Steps

The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee advises Bush Fire Management Committees that any person(s) who establish a planted forest in any area of the State that the steps set out in the Annexure are "Notified Steps" for the purposes of Section 63(4) of the Rural Fires Act 1997.



Phil Koperberg AO, AFSM, BEM

Chairman

30 October 2001

ANNEXURE: Notified Steps

Management Option	Risk Management Strategies	Responsible Agency / Land Manager
Avoid Risk	<p>For sites where harvestable plantations are to be established an assessment of the level of bushfire risk shall be made, and establishment avoided in areas with extreme bush fire risk (applicable only to new plantation developments).</p> <p>Limit plantation establishment to areas no closer than 30 metres from the nearest habitable building or in accordance with any asset protection zone requirements of an approved bush fire risk management plan for the area.</p> <p>No habitable structures should be built within 30m of an existing plantation.</p>	<p>Forests NSW/ Landowner</p> <p>Forests NSW / Landowner</p> <p>Councils/ Landowner</p>
Reduce Hazards	<p>Establish and maintain a system of perimeter and internal fire trails, and construct and maintain additional infrastructure in established plantations, to facilitate fire management.</p> <p>Promote reduction of grass fuels within plantations by such methods as grazing, mowing and slashing.</p> <p>Establish and maintain appropriate Strategic Fire Advantage Zones, to protect managed plantation assets, including hazard reduction management of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ significant areas of retained native vegetation within plantation properties; ❑ adjacent lands as agreed with neighbours. 	<p>Forests NSW / Landowner</p> <p>Forests NSW / Landowner</p> <p>Forests NSW/ Landowner</p>
Reduce Vulnerability	<p>Maintain strategic access roads and trails, to improve access to plantations.</p> <p>Establish and/or maintain dams or other watering points in strategic locations within plantations.</p>	<p>Forests NSW/ Landowner</p> <p>Forests NSW/ Landowner</p>
Reduce Ignitions	<p>Progressively restrict potential fire generating activities and access to plantations during periods of high to extreme fire danger.</p>	<p>Council / RFS / Forests NSW / NPWS/ Landowner</p>
Accept Residual Risk	<p>Maintain adequate fire detection, response and suppression systems.</p>	<p>Firefighting Agencies/ Landowner</p>