

Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Waroona
By email

Re: 11.1.2 Road Verge Development and Maintenance Policy

Dear Mr Goodlet

The Lake Clifton Herron Residents Association and the Lake Clifton Volunteer Bushfire Brigade are strongly opposed to the cessation of verge mowing in rural residential areas for the following reasons:

- If this policy is adopted throughout the Shire the fire risk will be increased substantially. There is mention in the proposal of mowing lawns but there are no lawns in rural areas . However there are very dense, waist high weeds which are at risk of catching fire through discarded cigarettes, blown out tyres and numerous other risks.

The fire in 2011 which destroyed 10 houses in Lake Clifton was started by a blown tyre on Forrest Highway. We have been unable to find an official report on the cause of that fire but have attached an ABC report at Appendix 1 which very clearly states that the cause was burning rubber from a burst tyre.

We frequently have hoons doing burn outs that could easily do it again.

- One of the issues identified in the report on the 2016 fire was the lack of fuel management and various recommendation were made to improve this matter. We have not seen any evidence that these recommendations have been implemented either by DPAW, DFES or the Shire of Waroona and this proposal to cease verge mowing flies in the face of these recommendation.

Extracts from the report of the special inquiry are attached at Appendix 2 to illustrate these issues.

- There are many FIFO workers, single ladies and others in Lake Clifton who are time poor or don't have the physical ability to look after verges on top of the high work load of looking after a large block.
- The relationship between many residents and the Shire is poor but is gradually being improved by some of the Shire's newer staff. There is a generally held view in this area that we receive very little service from the Shire and the removal of this service would set back that improvement process, particularly as the money saved is proposed to be spent on a project that will only benefit residents of the town.
- Verges in Lake Clifton and similar rural residential areas are simply too large to maintain using small machines such as conventional lawn mowers. So if residents did mow themselves, they would use ride on mowers or tractors. Very few such devices are registered for use on the road and thus they could be charged with an offence.
- It could be argued that requiring residents to maintain their verges places Council at risk of WHS claims.

Yours faithfully

Graeme Wyatt
Committee LCHRA
Secretary LCVBFB

APPENDIX 1

Lake Clifton Fire 2011 - ABC report re cause

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-05-17/lake-clifton-fire-not-deliberately-lit/2716948>

Police have revealed they no longer believe an arsonist was responsible for a fire that destroyed homes in Lake Clifton earlier this year.

The blaze burned 2,000 hectares of bushland and wiped out ten homes in January.

An initial examination showed there were several ignition points located along a six kilometre stretch of the Forrest Highway.

After months of investigations, police say the likely cause of the blaze was hot rubber that fell from a tyre and landed on dry grass.

Police have released a statement saying it is highly unlikely that an arsonist could have lit a blaze at several ignition points along a highway without being seen.

As a result the fire is no longer being treated as an arson.

APPENDIX 2

Extracts from REPORT OF THE SPECIAL INQUIRY INTO THE JANUARY 2016 WAROONA FIRE

Chapter 3 Executive Summary and Recommendations

Fuel Management and Fire Prevention

Recommendation 2: The Department of Parks and Wildlife to plan for the highest priority hazard reduction burning effort around settlements and critical assets in the South West and Perth Hills. The annual objective is to treat a total of 60,000 hectares of priority hazard reduction per annum, comprising 20,000 hectares per annum of Land Management Zone A and 40,000 hectares per year of Land Management Zone B.

Recommendation 4: The Departments of Parks and Wildlife and Fire and Emergency Services to develop options for the expansion of the 'Bushfire Mitigation Grant Scheme' utilising both State and Commonwealth Government funding to enable the implementation of hazard reduction works identified through the Bushfire Risk Management Planning process. This will target hazard reduction projects on land owned by private landholders in rural-urban interface areas, critical infrastructure protection, local government land, roadsides and land managed by utilities.

Recommendation 5: The Department of Fire and Emergency Services, utilising the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, to develop a simplified and fast track hazard reduction burn (and other fuel mitigation techniques) planning and approval process to ensure the timely conduct of township and asset protection burns by Bush Fire Brigades and individual property owners. The process is to be agile and adaptable for the range of stakeholders which may participate in low risk, small scale, low complexity burn planning and approvals.

Chapter 7 Fuel Management

Fuel management around Yarloop - A disaster waiting to happen?

Many government agencies in Western Australia own or manage land but undertake no bushfire management. That produces very serious consequences, one of which we believe was, in fact, the destruction of the town of Yarloop.³⁰

In examining fuels in the area affected by the Waroona fire it is clear that there is still some way to go to achieve the vision of 'shared responsibility' expressed in the Perth Hills Bushfire Report.

Private land owners are bound to undertake hazard reduction on their land, and can be issued with a notice from local government pursuant to section 33 of the Bush Fires Act 1954 requiring mitigation be undertaken on their property. However, there is no requirement for Crown land to be maintained to the same standard.

The Special Inquiry received evidence that identified a number of examples of poor fuel management practices. To quote examples:

Bagieau Road bush reserve has had no maintenance for many years. The last time the bush was cleared from under the power poles was back in 2003.³¹

Roadside vegetation and crown land, unburnt for 20 or more years, vacant town site land with dry grass, weeds and leaf litter unaltered by any form of bushfire mitigation

in the preceding spring provided the perfect scenario.³²

Many road verges were poorly maintained and carried heavy fuels of dry grass and weeds.³³

The saw mill on Campton Rd had no fire plan in place ... all the offcuts and old timber had been pushed into the bushland.³⁴

A new planting of plantation pines directly behind our residence has had no weed management, such that the dead weeds are quite thick around young pines.³⁵ Roadside burning has now ceased and no fuel reduction has occurred for several years. ³⁶

Discussion

These examples lead the Special Inquiry to the conclusion that regular, effective fuel management activities are not being undertaken by all landowners or bodies with responsibility for parcels of land. There are three important impediments to hazard reduction performance:

- the lack of implementing a BRMP process;
- the onerous nature of the hazard reduction burn process; and
- the lack of funds and resources to undertake these burns.

Recommendation 5: The Department of Fire and Emergency Services, utilising the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, to develop a simplified and fast track hazard reduction burn (and other fuel mitigation techniques) planning and approval process to ensure the timely conduct of township and asset protection burns by Bush Fire Brigades and individual property owners. The process is to be agile and adaptable for the range of stakeholders which may participate in low risk, small scale, low complexity burn planning and approvals.