

CROWDY BAY NATIONAL PARK WORKSHOP 5th and 6th June 2010

Presentations for the workshop were held at Harrington Bowling Club in the seaside village of Harrington. A small number of NCC representatives and guests attended, with four presentations and a field trip scheduled over the two days.



The attendees gave a précis of their position and experience as representatives.

Crowdy Bay National Park and Harrington

The attendees were:

David Smith - NCC rep Gloucester BFMC - advised will be terminating his position as NCC rep on the Gloucester BFMC in September 2010.

Kathleen Smith - NCC alt rep Great Lakes BFMC. Involved since 1957 in bushfire management in the Great Lakes area.

Helen Brown - NCC rep Lower Hunter/Hunter BFMC. Rep on a joint BFMC.

John Brown - interested observer.

David Holland - NCC rep Wyong BFMC. Only felt engagement with BFMC during Risk Management Plan process.

Daintry Gerrand - NCC rep Greater Taree BFMC. Consultant with a broad range of environmental experience. As relatively new rep with limited time has so far found it difficult to fulfil NCC rep role.

Anne Reeves - NCC Executive/BFAC member

Greg Banks - NCC staff/facilitator

Day 1

NCC Representative Key Issues

The following were raised as issues by the representatives in undertaking their roles on BFMCs.

- NCC representatives are not able to effectively participate in BFMC decision-making. This may be due to:
 - inability to attend key meetings;
 - not being encouraged to sit on sub-committees where decisions regarding risk management plans are made;
- Lack of acceptance by other agency representatives on the BFMCs. Ways to gain that acceptance were discussed;

- Environmental assets were not clearly identified in Risk Management Plans. Conservation agreements were not identified. Habitat corridors, PVPs, GER not recognized in plans.
- Some BFMCS hold meetings only twice a year, making effective input difficult for representatives who do not have detailed knowledge of ongoing issues/processes which employed land management agency reps are involved in;
- An induction process for all new members (ie not only NCC reps) should be undertaken;
- Lack of appropriate representatives in some areas to represent NCC at BFMCS;
- The setup of BRIMS does not enable NCC reps to have ready access to the information which has been input by land management agencies and the Rural Fire Service. Also, with its current focus on the area of hazard reduction achieved, BRIMS does not provide information in a form that assists in understanding the effectiveness of risk intervention management strategies.

Presentation1 - Terry Kitching Community Safety Officer Manning Team NSW RFS
How Hotspots can benefit land managers/property owners

Terry gave a slide presentation and advised how the Hotspots programme had been implemented in the Northern Rivers region. Terry described how Hotspots draws on the knowledge of local landowners and land management agency officers to prepare and implement fire management programmes to benefit the landholders involved. It has the ability to encourage neighbouring landholders to become involved in the projects and enables landholders to utilize the resources and on-ground skills of land management agencies such as the CMA, RFS, NPWS and Forests NSW.

Terry advised that the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA was keen to hold Hotspot workshops in the Taree area later this year. As there are a significant number of Property Vegetation Plans now registered in this area, it is an opportunity to introduce the Hotspots programme to provide those landholders with a tool to achieve good fire management outcomes in bushland areas set aside for ecological benefits.

Presentation 2 - Kevin Carter Area Manager NPWS
Fire History of Crowdy Bay NP and the impacts of fire on vegetation communities

Kevin's presentation focused on the impacts that unplanned fires have had on Crowdy Bay National Park's vegetation communities. He emphasized the variety of vegetation communities that occur in the park, the impacts on and differing fire behaviour of these coastal and swamp forest communities, and the difficulties involved in managing wildfires once they had started. He also highlighted the difficulties in implementing hazard reduction burns in the park due to the lack of

available control lines caused by the swampy terrain. The problems in preventing wildfires from impacting on life and property in Harrington due to the close proximity of the village to swamp vegetation (generally on private property or vacant Crown Land) were also discussed.

Following the presentation there was a field trip, with the group using two 4WD vehicles to inspect sections of the park and surrounds of particular interest.

Site 1: Christies Lane - This is an area of dry sclerophyll forest that is habitat for a significant koala colony. Kevin pointed out that if wildfire threatened this area, provided conditions were suitable backburning could be undertaken to protect the colony. Kevin pointed out that the local Koala rescue organization - Koalas in Care - had rescued some koalas in this area during the last large bushfire in 2007.



The group examining koala habitat

Site 2: Industrial Road - This area of dry sclerophyll forest exhibited several species of banksias which appeared in good health and not impacted severely by fire. Dumping of rubbish was noted in this location, contributing to the fuel load.

Site 3: Pilot Hill - The high point of Harrington, this gave the group an excellent overview of the town and its surrounds, along with a rundown of the history of the town and area.

Site 4 & 5: Crowdy Bay Rd - At two points along the road the group were shown the types of vegetation that had been burned extensively in the past. A shrubland/heath complex prevails with patches of littoral rainforest occurring along the roadside. Along the southern side of the road a powerline was pointed out to the group which was to be the subject of a presentation the following day.

At Site 5 the mature banksias clearly showed the effects of a succession of fires, with all trees killed. Only few juvenile banksias had sprouted since the last fire, due to the high number of fires that had occurred in this section along the roadside. Bitou Bush, initially introduced for stabilisation post sand mining, had taken over the area since that fire.



Mature banksias killed by wildfire

Daintry Gerrand explained that a concentrated Bitou Bush control program undertaken by local volunteers had reduced the extent of Bitou Bush considerably, allowing native vegetation a chance to reestablish.

Site 6: Crowdy Head Lighthouse lookout - This vantage point gave the group an extensive panorama of the National Park and the hinterland beyond.

Site 7: Crowdy Bay Rd - Due to heavy rains in the preceding days the swampy nature of the park was in full view. Even through the thick heath/grassland/swamp forest vegetation water was clearly visible in the swamps, and was overflowing across the road at numerous points. The group stopped at a culvert under the road, where a chorus of frogs were in full voice. The thick nature of the vegetation was noted, with the impacts that this had on fire suppression. Swamp heath can burn very intensively when ignited, as occurred in the wildfire of January 2007. Even when standing water occurs in the swamps, the dense nature of the shrub and grass vegetation means it is able to burn on relatively cool days if strong winds prevail. It was also pointed out that Crowdy Bay Rd was one of the few roads or tracks across the park from which suppression works could be initiated.

Day 2

Presentation 3 - Miles Dixon Natural Area Support Officer - Great Lakes Council
Issues for Councils in implementing Asset Protection Zones

This presentation examined the issues that Great Lakes Council has had in establishing and maintaining APZs on its reserves and the procedures that it has put in place. There are 720ha of Council managed land in the LGA, with 32ha dedicated to implementation of APZs. Over 200 separate APZs exist on Council's lands.

APZs are the prime protection method used by Council, and the development of the Bushfire Risk Management Plan has provided good support in their continued maintenance.

A Council initiative has been the preparation of Fire Mitigation Plans for 6 of the villages in the LGA. Although there was minimal community consultation in their preparation Council intends to use them in the preparation of Village Protection Plans where it is envisaged wider consultation will be undertaken. The Fire Mitigation Plans have been an asset for Council's planners, who are now able to access an APZ layer on the GIS when assessing development applications.

Funding of the APZ program is an issue for Council, with much of the ongoing works requiring successful bids under one of the bushfire mitigation works funds. Council sees some APZs as only providing safe access for firefighters, not

necessarily providing sufficient separation to provide safety to dwellings and residents.

The maintenance of APZs is often undertaken with the twin goals of bush regeneration and fire mitigation. Miles emphasized that APZ implementation in bushland areas aimed for minimal ground cover disturbance and providing a separation between the ground cover and the canopy. This entails modification of the shrub layer. Most work in bushland areas is undertaken with hand tools to minimize disturbance. Even so bushland APZs often end up as highly modified sites, and sometimes works areas that were originally modified with hand tools end up as slashed sites.

Presentation 4 - Clint Hansell Vegetation Operations Coordinator - Country Energy *Vegetation management under power lines*

Clint gave a brief overview of Country Energy's setup and the network. It is a State owned utility that must apply to its regulator for funding. Apart from an aging network which requires upgrading, it inherited a number of issues, including poor management of vegetation under power lines, from its predecessor. Vegetation has been identified as the single biggest potential risk facing Country Energy.

The Vegetation Operations section has been centralized into 5 vegetation zones across the State. The Mid North Coast (MNC) section, of which Clint is the coordinator, extends from Karuah in the south to Grafton in the north. This section's role is to maintain vegetation under power lines.

A 2-year inspection cycle is undertaken in the MNC section. Urban areas are inspected annually, and half of the rural areas are also inspected annually. Annual pre bushfire season aerial and ground patrols are also undertaken to ensure lines have the required clearance in place.

Under the Coordinator are 14 Vegetation Management Officers whose task it is to inspect lines and identify potential vegetation issues, consult landowners and authorities and detail works to be undertaken. Funding is currently not an issue with a budget of over \$15m set aside for vegetation works in the MNC area.

Minimum vegetation clearances apply to power lines depending on the voltage, with Country Energy legally required to achieve that minimum clearance. Under low voltage lines the minimum clearance is 1m, and under 11kV lines it is 1.5m. An extra 0.5m clearance is required in bushfire prone areas.

Pre bushfire season patrols are now being undertaken earlier than previously. Where patrols used to commence in July/August, the patrols now take place during the period from April to July to be ready for early bushfire seasons.

Pruning of trees is the main mitigation technique, with trees only removed where pruning will not satisfy legal requirements. Planted trees are prioritised for removal over native vegetation. A corridor reclamation programme is underway over the next 4 years, which aims to identify and address areas of high fire risk and poor performing feeders. Narrow corridors, trees with structural problems, and overhanging areas are targeted. Clint emphasised that alternatives to vegetation management eg. underground power, covered conductors, are comparatively very expensive. However Country Energy have employed a range of special techniques in some particularly fireprone areas where tree lopping and vegetation removal had to be minimised for environmental reasons. These include zig-zagging of the power line over roads to avoid specific areas of vegetation, or vertical separation of the shrub and canopy layers of the vegetation by regularly removing regrowth.

Ninety percent of fires associated with power lines are caused by vegetation. Sagging lines occur on hot days and high use days, lines can sway toward vegetation and trees can be whipped across lines and lose limbs on windy days.

Along the Harrington to Crowdy Head power line occur areas of SEPP #26 Littoral Rainforest which the power line traverses. Country Energy engaged an Environmental Consultant to conduct a Review of Environmental Factors (REF), which set out a 5 year management plan. The REF identified that some vegetation would peak in growth below the lines. Alternatives considered other than vegetation management would only delay growth, and still result in pruning being required. The aim of the management plan is to restrict the areas where growth will become a problem, so new growth is hand cleared and mature trees are not removed. It takes only 1 day/year to maintain the corridor and the program has reduced visual impact.

For those who would like more information about the presentations given at the workshop, please contact Bushfire Program Manager Greg Banks by email gbanks@nccnsw.org.au.