



*PRESERVING AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST GARDEN SUBURB*

*P.O. BOX 85, HUNTERS HILL, N.S.W. 2110*

17 October 2014

Stuart Ayres MP  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Dear Mr Ayres,

**The Rural Fire Service 10/50 Clearing Code of Practice**

I write to you on behalf of The Hunters Hill Trust, a body of concerned citizens of the Municipality of Hunters Hill that was formed in 1968. This was a time when metropolitan Sydney was undergoing a rebuilding spree and in Hunters Hill fine old sandstone houses were being pulled down and replaced with crudely designed 3 storey walk-up flats and when a great swathe was cut through the middle of the municipality for an expressway.

**The character of Hunters Hill**

Over the years the Trust, in association with the Hunters Hill Council, has been successful in documenting and maintaining much of Hunters Hill's heritage and its garden suburb character. We have been instrumental in introducing ground breaking measures to protect that character, including heritage listings for buildings and bushland, conservation zones, tree protection and the establishment of a register of significant trees.

Because of its interface with the Parramatta and Lane Cove Rivers, much of Hunters Hill's unique character contributes to the wider character of Sydney harbour so that it has regional significance. This is recognised by the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (Sydney Harbour Catchment) 2005, which outlines in its objectives a host of planning principles for land within the Sydney Harbour Catchment to preserve and maintain the special character of Sydney Harbour.

These objectives refer particularly to the protection and rehabilitation of watercourses, wetlands, riparian corridors, remnant native vegetation and ecological connectivity within the catchment. The objectives also outline the need to prevent or restore land degradation and to protect water quality.

Clearly the maintenance and protection of the existing tree cover and vegetation on private and public lands in places like Hunters Hill is essential not only for the protection of land and water quality but also to its character.

**The Hunters Hill Trust's opposition to the 10/50 Code**

With the introduction of the 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice the unique character of much of the foreshores of Sydney Harbour will be put at considerable risk.

As you know, the Code allows people in designated bushfire prone areas to remove any tree that is within 10m of their house and vegetation up to 50m from their house **without any approval**.

While The Trust understands the need to mitigate the potential impact of bushfires on buildings and properties we are opposed to the blanket introduction of this scheme into sensitive urban areas such as Hunters Hill. We are also disturbed by the cavalier way this scheme has been introduced.

The particulars of our opposition to this scheme are as follows:

- The RFS has introduced this scheme without proper documentation of the areas to which it applies. There are no overall maps of the fire prone areas and the only way of ascertaining whether a property falls within the 10/50 clearing zone is through a lot by lot assessment with the RFS online DIY tool.

- The RFS has unilaterally extended the areas considered fire prone and introduced new areas of fire prone land.
- The RFS has failed to properly consult with local Councils before introducing the 10/50 clearing code.
- The indiscriminate and uncontrolled clearing of trees and vegetation in areas such as Hunters Hill will have a disastrous impact on its heritage values and character.
- The removal of professional assessment and oversight of tree and vegetation clearing will lead to accidents, property damage, soil erosion and water pollution.
- The code does not allow for the protection of trees listed as heritage items or significant trees
- The code undoes years of work to educate people of the importance of trees and vegetation in their gardens.
- The fact that property owners can pressure their neighbours clear vegetation via the threat of a hazard complaint will lead to fights and disharmony in the community.
- The code overrides Council's tree and vegetation management controls.
- The indiscriminate removal of trees and vegetation will have a significant adverse impact on biodiversity, bird and animal habitat and wildlife corridors.
- The Code is a simplistic response to a complex problem.
- Research has shown that hazard reduction is less effective at halting the spread of fire when the fire is extreme, which is the only likely level of fire that would impact on urban areas such as Hunters Hill and the other harbourside municipalities.

#### **Two examples from Hunters Hill**

The two photos below are of Bonnefin Road Hunters Hill. The whole of this street is now included as part of the extended fire prone land. All that you can see in both photos is subject to 10/50 clearing without approval.

Properties in the street are currently subject to a tree preservation order, which means that Council has control over maintaining the garden character of the street. The 10/50 code means that the street is now at risk as property owners may embark on tree removal and clearing without any formal approval or professional assessment.





This photo above is of Bonnefin Road's foreshore on the Lane Cove River. The whole of this area, which is of State significance, is now at risk.

#### **Conclusion**

The Trust believes that the 10/50 Clearing Code has been introduced as a knee-jerk reaction to the disastrous bushfires that destroyed so many houses that were completely surrounded by the Blue Mountains National Park in Winmalee last year. It has been applied without proper consideration across areas of Sydney where it is entirely inappropriate and where it has the potential to cause enormous damage.

We urge you, as minister responsible for Emergency Services, to immediately cancel the 10/50 Clearing Code before some of Sydney's most beautiful areas are irreversibly destroyed by wanton tree felling and clearing.

Further measures undertaken at the behest of the RFS to reduce the risk of bushfire damage should only be introduced after

- Full consultation with the various Councils involved,
- Public exhibition proposed revisions to the maps of fire prone land
- A proper exhibition period to allow for submissions from property owners and other interested bodies
- Proper scientific assessment of the various risk factors

Yours sincerely,

Tony Coote  
President The Hunters Hill Trust

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