



Media release

The Hon Matthew Guy MLC

Minister for Planning

Minister for Multicultural Affairs & Citizenship

Wednesday 28 May 2014

Key reforms will streamline bushfire regulations

- **Long consultation period leads to sensible reforms to bushfire regulations**
- **Recommendations ensure 'primacy of life' remains a planning priority**
- **A new \$700,000 Bushfire Planning Assistance Fund for landowners, councils**

Sweeping changes have been made to Victoria's bushfire planning regulations, designed to give greater certainty to residents and landowners in bushfire designated areas across Victoria.

After a long period of consultation, Planning Minister Matthew Guy has adopted reforms that will allow alternative safety measures and sensible safety regulations to be considered, which may enable people to build on land with a higher Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) rating.

"The Victorian Coalition Government said that reforms would come after a period of consultation and that is precisely what we are doing," Mr Guy said.

"These reforms do not contradict the findings of the Black Saturday Royal Commission but they do introduce new procedures of fairness to the bushfire planning regulatory system."

Key features of the reforms include:

- Allowing private bushfire bunkers as an alternative safety measure, where there may be increased bushfire safety risks that need additional consideration;
- Allowing vegetation clearance to achieve defensible space. The cleared area around a home is vital to protecting the home's occupants. Vegetation clearance obligations ('defensible space') would be limited to the title boundary of the relevant property;
- Ensuring the assessment of bushfire risk is consistent with the Australian Standard;
- Allowing more sensible bushfire safety measures in new master-planned estates; and
- Allowing homes to be built on 'infill' lots surrounded by other dwellings. Where a dwelling is allowed, it will be able to be built with a fair and equitable bushfire response.

A new \$700,000 assistance fund will enable affected landowners and councils to streamline planning processes.

"As part of the reform package, the Napthine Government will provide \$700,000 to create the Bushfire Planning Assistance Fund," Mr Guy said. "This will ensure the effective implementation of the reforms and provide real solutions."

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The fund will be available for a number of purposes, including:

- Direct assistance to help affected landholders make planning permit applications;
- Assisting the Rural Planning Flying Squad to deal with any backlog of relevant permit applications at rural and regional councils;
- Grants for councils to develop localised schedules to the Bushfire Management Overlay, to streamline permit requirements locally;
- Any future update of the world-first bushfire planning iPad app developed by Alpine Shire Council; and
- The setting up of a special Victorian Building Authority committee to advise on building system regulatory reforms related to bushfire safety.

Mr Guy said everyone was aware of the need to have a household Bushfire Plan, and to leave early on days of extreme fire risk.

“Victorians make informed decisions about living in areas of bushfire risk, and take responsibility for the risks of living in that environment,” Mr Guy said.

“By encouraging people to build homes to higher safety standards, the Napthine Government is improving the safety of the building stock as a whole. I hope that more Victorians will take the initiative of voluntarily improving the safety features of their existing home.

“These changes will help Victorians address the challenges of living in bushfire prone areas. It will see common sense return to planning decision making, while ensuring Victorians build their homes to the best possible standards,” Mr Guy said.

The statewide amendment will be implemented shortly.

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