7 Principles for Landscape Architects in response to bushfires

Discussion points in no particular order

Whilst these discussion points are provided in the context of response to extreme fire events, they also apply to other natural and climate-driven disasters, especially floods, droughts, wind and storms, extreme temperatures and the resilience factors associated with them such as land and soil stability and preservation; biodiversity protection; water conservation; pollution and waste management.

1. Practitioners must keep accreditation and practice skills up-to-date.
   1. Awareness of new technology, materials, methods and land management.
   2. Designs must be assessed in accordance with category of natural disaster risks inc bushfire events and the conditions that precede them and follow them.
   3. Use formal review and accreditation processes where available including indigenous knowledge.

**Principle: an RLA provides increased assurance and skills to their products, services and projects.**

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1. No single method is the right response, all solutions are driven by a combination of unique factors.
   1. NSW currently has landscape types ranging from alpine to low-land rainforests, coastal to desert. Fire regimes and management solutions will be different in all these places.
   2. The overall climate of Australia is changing, with even the best science and cultural understanding there is no way to fully protect developed lands and urbanised areas from extreme fire events.
   3. Some practices need to be balanced with other land management issues, such as pathogens and biosecurity (eg Myrtle Rust spores are spread at ground level by water and carriers (people, animals), and by wind from heat updrafts including low-temperature burns).
   4. Approaches risk, land management and usage, governance and social/cultural values constantly change. Landscape architects are key and forefront in the creation, protection and promotion of places that enshrine social values despite physical changes.

**Principle: the landscape is dynamic. The science, knowledge and impacts of bushfires change with each event; so too must the responses by landscape architects and any discipline. RLAs will incorporate broader requirements (such as RFS guidelines), but interpret and prepare responses that are best for the conditions of each unique place and their land managers.**

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1. The patterns of urbanisation and land use have spread people into higher risk areas, particularly along coastal and rangelands where settlement and access have previously been too difficult or expensive.
   1. Landscape architects must have a stronger voice in planning decisions and urban developments to bridge the division between the demand for expanded development and practical, appropriate landscape management.
   2. Landscape architects can contribute to place-specific solutions that are part of a broader suite of developments or land uses.
   3. Landscape architectural services do not finish at the delivery of the design, because landscape is a dynamic process and relies on the prescribed management intended by the landscape architect. The landscape architect produces the design commensurate with the resources and capabilities of the land owner or prescribed manager.

**Principle: landscape architects must advocate and practice land stewardship as part of their services, and prepare landscape management documentation as part of the design delivery.**

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1. Landscape architects and allied landscape practitioners work across all levels of public and private sectors, which can assist with coordinated solutions and design approaches.
   1. The public sector can produce strategies and frameworks at a macroscale and provides much work and services of the private sector, which often produces the details and specifications at a finer scale. Both these sectors draw on the findings from the education and research sector. All contribute to complete, considered solutions.
   2. Innovations and new solutions developed by specialist and niche practitioners can be applied at larger scale with the assistance and interpretation of landscape architects in the public sector.
   3. There is a broad, ongoing and unresolved social debate about the incorporation and collaboration with Traditional Custodians of this country, and the many ways of getting the best of competing cultures and making reparations. AILA has a RAP, as do most government agencies. Some private practitioners are better placed and more skilled that most agencies to share and disseminate this knowledge. The scale of effort required for response to the recent disaster events and mitigate impacts of future events is so large that it cannot be held in any one approach or cultural system.
   4. Each sector has strengths and weaknesses, but best results are achieved with collaboration.

**Principle: public sector landscape architects, especially those in project-delivery agencies, can call on resources including funding that can be made available to the private sector in both preparing for and responding to disaster events. Contemporary application of traditional practices is a part of this response. No solution-policies are possible without this cooperation.**

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1. The policies, programs and places that landscape architects work on are usually something else for most of the time – space that may be public, private or for special uses; national parks and local plazas; quiet streets and busy roads; playgrounds and sportsfields; gardens and groves; grasslands and forests; plans for improvement and strategies for investment. All these have recreation, production, cultural, economic functions that need to be sustainable, attractive and resilient, and fit for that purpose.
   1. Landscape architects contribute to liveable places and resilient and sustainable systems beyond visual aesthetics.
   2. The products of landscape architects contribute to local, regional and national economies; attractions for tourists and better amenity for residents; connecting places to make business and build societies; providing identity to new places and protecting the natural and cultural values of existing lands and systems.
   3. Landscape architects look at places and systems for their multitude of uses and opportunities, and provide layers of meaning and value rather than single-purpose, single-use spaces. This is why well-designed civic areas with wayfinding and robust materials such as town centres, showgrounds and coastal parklands are the key refuge and evacuation mustering points in bushfire-prone places.

**Principle: Landscape architects can embed value and protect investments in response to bushfire management beyond raw asset protection and designated land zones; and their contributions must be included in the national and state responses.**

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1. Landscape architects think contextually and work specifically, which is how bushfires and other natural disasters also impact.
   1. Patterns of living and land use are changing, along with social needs, behaviours, technology and resource deployment. It is possible to share expensive equipment and communicate around the entire coastal perimeter nation quickly, which offers capabilities previously unavailable. Landscape architects can design these connections into their solutions.
   2. Specific emergency response activities still, and will always, require locally available resources and an intimate knowledge of local conditions. Landscape architects can assist the emergency response effort through better planning and design.
   3. Landscape architects are trained to think beyond site boundaries and local constraints; they are trained to think and respond systemically. Absolute solutions at the expense of other critical infrastructure or onerous land management will not work as they will cause economic pain or increase risk for other significant issues, such as power or transport infrastructure, significant scenic and cultural places, reduced biodiversity of urban and peri-urban green spaces, and healthy recreational and agricultural lands.

**Principle: Places designed by landscape architects are generally intended to endure for decades, often longer than their associated contemporary buildings (especially for residential-grade structures). Longevity requires resilience, sustainability and robustness. Further, remote places also require increased self-reliance. These contextual and temporal principles practised by all RLAs are consistent with disaster and emergency response planning and post-recovery.**

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1. Landscape architects are very conscious of the budget, effort and methods to install and grow landscapes, often with limited resources and with activities and obligations that occur well-after the works contract has completed and are reliant on external factors.
   1. Landscape architects are trained to be resourceful and efficient with their materials and work methods. This is because the landscape areas of many projects are not given a purpose beyond aesthetic investment, and the requirements for best management are beyond what the land owner is willing to provide.
   2. Landscape architects think prudentially, and value cost-effectiveness rather than frugality. This approach usually results in solutions being long-term and sustainable rather than activity-intense and of limited duration.
   3. Landscape architects work in integrated teams, and often in project management leadership roles.

**Principle: The contribution of landscape architects to the bushfire response will extend beyond dealing wit the botanical or ecological elements -it extends to logistics, risk and asset management, product development and design production, landscape and urban place management, and quality assurance, assessment and governance. Discussions and responses from AILA will extend beyond thinking about the “green layer” and bushland.**