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Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Submission by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA)

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) is the peak national body for the Landscape Architecture. AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship. We provide our members with training, recognition and a community of practice to share knowledge, ideas and action.

With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design, planning and management of the natural and built environment.

In operation since 1966, AILA represents over 3,500 landscape architects and promotes excellence in planning and designing for life outdoors. Committed to designing and creating a better spaces in Australia, landscape architects have the skills and expertise to improve the nation's livability through a unique approach to planning issues via innovative integrated solutions. In doing so, landscape architects contribute towards better environmental, social and economic outcomes for all Australians

Preface

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) welcomes the Commission of Enquiry into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

This submission provides AILA's position on Australia's ability to prevent, mitigate and respond to bushfires and other natural disasters.

AILA's supports the royal commission's commitment to reviewing development and implementation of adaptation strategies and actions to reduce Australians from unnecessary exposure to risks posed by increasingly frequent and intense natural hazards.

AILA asserts that a national Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) framework is developed and applied in relation to land management, biodiversity and habitat conservation and wider land use planning.

AILA asserts that the Australian Government has a role in seeking nationally consistent oversight, accountability and reporting frameworks for enhancing resilience to and recovery from natural disasters.

AILA's National Advocacy Committee met in January and February 2020 to consider and discuss AILA's response to the bushfires, as well as a range of matters in response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements that was subsequently announced by the Australian Government.

Landscape architects have an opportunity to assist in the enhancing the resilience of communities in recovery.

Landscape architects play a critical role in informing new approaches to protection, and disaster risk reduction to property and assets, and regeneration of natural systems. AILA's Bushfire Position Statement informs this submission.

There are five priority considerations AILA recommends for the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements to consider, as follows:

- 1. Understanding and demonstrating the role of landscapes in enhancing resilience through urban planning, design and environmental management.**
- 2. Hazard reduction around our cities, towns and urban edges**
- 3. Strengthening traditional land management practices**
- 4. Incorporate multi-use open spaces into emergency preparation and DRR planning.**
- 5. Establish State-based disaster resilience, planning and recovery agencies**

1. Understanding and demonstrating the role of landscapes in enhancing resilience through urban planning, design and environmental management

The science, knowledge and impacts of bushfire changes with each event; so too must the responses by local authorities, land managers, and asset owners.

The management of landscapes to mitigate bushfire risk is context-specific across Australia and appropriate data analysis and evaluation frameworks are needed. This is critical – local analysis and appreciation will assist in future mitigation, risk management and protection strategies of our landscapes.

In relation to understanding the role of landscapes in urban planning and environmental management AILA recommends the following.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1.1

Recognise different landscape and land use types – e.g. farming, bushland, peri-urban, green corridors, river and creek systems, and urban areas and apply specific overlays to account for these regional variations and types.

Recommendation 1.2

Amended planning codes for land management to recognise regional variation focussing on outcomes and performance criteria rather than deferring to the current code-based prescriptive approach land use planning.

Recommendation 1.3

Promote the development and retention of community knowledge about managing landscapes in fire risk areas should be a priority. This begins with developing an appreciation of a much broader range of stakeholders and viewpoints.

Recommendation 1.4

Protect existing natural systems (eg urban national parks, regional parks, large park lands and expansive river and creek systems) that are of high ecological value and are environmentally sensitive.

2. Hazard reduction around our cities, towns and urban edges

The patterns of urbanisation and land use have spread people, settlements, and activity into higher risk areas, particularly along coastal and rangelands where access has previously been too difficult or expensive.

The resulting development patterns place new pressure on often fragile ecosystems, as well as creating heightened risk in fringe areas for bushfire, flooding, and other natural disasters which impact communities that were not previously at risk.

Recommendations

Recommendation 2.1

A NDRR Framework should recognise the need to preserve critical urban landscape values in fire risk areas. This can be achieved by improving our understanding of landscape management practices that mitigate fire risk, and reduce our dependence on hazard reduction during the lengthening fire season.

Recommendation 2.2

Policies on land management on the urban edge need to reflect the evidence. The removal of complex vegetation does not reduce bushfire risk on a broad scale in fact extensive clearing increases surface temperatures and reduce humidity along with many other destructive processes, including the drying out soils, encouraging more biomass litter fall and litter.

Recommendation 2.3

Policies and strategies are required to create and manage buffer zones, flood, and flame zones around residential and industrial areas of our cities, regions, and towns. This includes managing the appropriate mix of vegetation while preserving key species.

Recommendation 2.4

Land managers need resources to develop a better understanding of specific maintenance regimes for buffer zones such as the use of mechanical methods (e.g. mowing and slashing) along with bushfire management (seasonal cool burns) to maintain the critical landscape values and enhance the resilience of urban edge ecological communities.

3. Strengthening Traditional Land Management Practices

AILA commends the inquiry for seeking to explore ways in which traditional land and fire management practices of Indigenous Australians can improve Australia's resilience to natural disasters.

The scale of effort required for the response to recent disaster events is so large that it cannot be held by any one approach or cultural system.

There is a broad, ongoing, and unresolved social debate about the incorporation and collaboration with Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the many ways of reconciling competing cultures, sharing knowledge, and making reparations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3.1

Advocate and promote new opportunities for leadership, education, training, and employment of landscape managers for fire risk reduction through a much broader engagement with the community and the industries engaged in National Disaster Risk Reduction.

Recommendation 3.2

Invest in awareness, engagement, and education of local communities (especially those in bushfire risk areas) should be deployed comprehensively.

Recommendation 3.3

Convening an agreed mechanism to explore, share and expand the management of lands using traditional methods of mitigation, risk management and protection.

4. Incorporate multi-use open spaces into emergency preparation and DRR planning.

Our urban, rural, and regional open landscapes play a vital role in bushfire preparedness, aftermath, and recovery. For example, sports ovals, parks, and other open spaces play a critical role as last resort safe refuges for communities.

Landscapes have recreational, production, cultural, and economic functions and value and need to be sustainable, attractive, resilient, and fit for that purpose.

The management of these landscapes should also reflect their important role in the protection of lives in catastrophic fire events before, during and after bushfire events.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4.1

Consider the role of our recreational and sporting facilities during and after disaster events

5. Establish State-based disaster resilience, planning and recovery agencies

A priority action for a NDRR Framework should be to fund permanent, State-based disaster resilience, planning and recovery agencies.

These agencies would be responsible for enhancing community resilience and building back better after disaster. As many landscapes recover, which can take decades, proactive landscape management has a critical ongoing role.

Community advocacy on the importance of habitat and biodiversity would be a part of the agency's remit, including the value of landscapes and their role in bushfire management. The proposed agencies must be able to access the skills and expertise of consultants to contribute to recovery following a disaster event.

Managing resilient landscapes will extend to logistics, risk and asset management, product development and design production, landscape and urban place project procurement and management, and quality assurance, assessment, and governance. All these ongoing issues will benefit from the oversight from a NDRR framework. The implementation of necessary actions can only be provided by adequately managed permanent state-based agencies.

Recommendations

Recommendation 5.1

Investigate establishment of State-based agencies responsible for landscape resilience, planning and recovery.

Sincerely,



Shaun Walsh
AILA National President



Ben Stockwin
AILA Chief Executive Officer

29 April 2020



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AILA National President



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AILA Chief Executive Officer

29 April 2020