

SUBMISSION

NO. 028

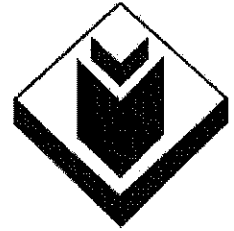


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- 4 MAY 2007

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Australian Building Codes Board



Executive Officer
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
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Dear Sir/Madam

On 30 March 2007, the Hon. John Pandazopoulos, Chair of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, wrote to me seeking a submission on the Inquiry into the Impact of Public Land Management Practices on Bushfires in Victoria.

Whilst the terms of reference of the Inquiry are not directly relevant to the work of the Australian Building Codes Board, a brief explanation of the role of the Building Code of Australia in respect of bushfire-prone areas and discussion on the potential impact of land management practices on building construction is attached.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Donaldson'.

Ivan Donaldson
Executive Director

| May 2007

The Australian Building Codes Board

The Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) is a joint initiative of all levels of Australian Government and includes representatives from the building industry. The Board was established by an inter-government agreement signed by the Australian Government and State and Territory Ministers responsible for building regulatory matters on 1 March 1994 and reaffirmed by Ministers in 2001 and 2006.

The Board consists of industry representatives, a representative of the Australian Government, all State and Territory Governments, senior executives responsible for building regulatory matters, and a Local Government representative. The ABCB reports directly to the Australian Government, State and Territory Ministers responsible for building regulatory matters, and provides a vital link for the building industry between building practice and Government building regulatory policy.

The Board's mission is to address issues relating to health, safety, amenity and sustainability by providing for efficiency in the design, construction and performance of buildings through the BCA and the development of effective regulatory systems. The ABCB's primary role is to develop and maintain the Building Code of Australia (BCA).

The Building Code of Australia

The BCA is produced and maintained by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) on behalf of the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments. The BCA is brought into operation by enabling building regulatory legislation in each State and Territory. This legislation prescribes or "calls up" the BCA to fulfil any technical requirements which have to be satisfied in order to gain approval of a building proposal.

The BCA contains provisions for the design and construction of buildings and other structures, covering such matters as structural sufficiency, fire resistance, access and egress, services and equipment, and certain aspects of health and amenity.

The BCA contains provisions for construction of certain buildings in areas that have been designated as bushfire-prone under a power of legislation. The purpose of the provisions is to reduce the risk of ignition from a bushfire while the fire front passes. The BCA references AS 3959 Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas, for the purpose of classifying the level of bushfire attack on a site and the construction requirements to resist that level of attack.

Effect of land management practices on construction in bushfire-prone areas

AS 3959 is currently under review by Standards Australia's committee FP-020. As part of the review, FP-020 is developing a new, more sophisticated methodology for classifying the level of bushfire attack on a site. One of the factors influencing the level of bushfire attack on a site is the fuel load associated with nearby vegetation. For some sites, this vegetation will be located on public land.

In the absence of a consistent policy on and implementation of public land management practices, assumptions need to be made about vegetation fuel loads over the life of the building. In cases where it is assumed that there will be no fuel load management, and fuel load reductions are undertaken on an ongoing basis, the construction methods applied may be overly conservative for actual exposure levels, resulting in unnecessary costs and over-regulation.

Conversely, if it is assumed that fuel load reduction will be undertaken and it is not, buildings may be exposed to an unacceptable level of risk over their life.

A consistent policy on land management practices that affect vegetation fuel loads would be of benefit in ensuring that decisions about the construction required to resist attack from bushfires result in an acceptable level of risk without imposing unnecessary costs.