

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR  
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

**Organisation:** Wollongong City Council

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Mr David Shoebridge MLC  
Committee Chair  
Public Accountability Committee  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
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The Director, Public Accountability Committee

## **INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS - INVITATION TO MAKE A SUBMISSION**

### **Wollongong City Council – Bushfire Grant Funding - Bushfire Relief Enquiry Submission**

Thank you for your invitation to contribute to your inquiry into the integrity, efficacy and value for money of NSW Government Grant programs, specifically related to grants for bushfire relief.

Wollongong City Council as a public authority and public land owner and occupier is responsible for taking practicable steps to prevent the occurrence of bush fires on, and to minimise the spread of a bush fire from land vested in or under its control or management, as outlined in Sect 63 of the Rural Fires Act 1997. In respect to this, Wollongong City Council is responsible for the management of 365 Asset protection zones (APZ) across the LGA as identified in the Illawarra Bush Fire Risk Management Plan. Council's APZ are managed mostly through mechanical means and many sites are restricted to hand control due to a suite of environmental constraints. Wollongong City Council has an annual recurrent budget for this works; however, funding is sought annually through the NSW Rural Fire Service grant funding programmes.

Below is a list of comments and suggestions relating to the grant funding process on reflection by our organisation.

- Wollongong City Council applies for funding for APZ works almost exclusively through the NSW Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF).
- There has been an inconsistent approach to submitting funding applications (i.e. direct to the district via spreadsheet or through the grant funding portal) which can cause confusion internally with agencies and communication with external agencies.
- The funding assessment team seems to be removed from the district office staff and there was no clear indication of communication between the two.
- Historically funding applications were sought early in the calendar year;
- The timing of funding determination and approvals is inconsistent and more often than not announced after the start to the bushfire season.
- This year 2020-21 it was announced in late January; therefore, almost at the end of the season. We are encouraged to apply for funding to treat higher priority sites within the LGA; however, when funding announcements are made late, this leaves the more at-risk sites vulnerable over the highest risk period.

- When funding is announced late, it leaves little time for sites to be treated effectively over the bushfire season and pressure on agencies to roll out projects and ensure expenditure prior to end of financial year.
- Wollongong City Council's on-ground bushfire program is contracted and often the appointed contractors have other project commitments with end of financial year deadlines.
- Feedback regarding the determination of unsuccessful applications is limited and not clear if resubmission is an option and if so the process for doing so.

#### Recommendations

- Pre-season funding announcements to allow adequate timing for funding expenditure and most importantly effective management of high priority grant funded sites.
- Greater flexibility with the expenditure of funds within project sites to aid efficient and responsible management of funds as site requirements can vary seasonally and it would be helpful to be able to utilise funding accordingly.
- Greater opportunity for funding of non-operational projects that would support scientific research into post fire recovery, and social science projects targeting community engagement in peri-urban environments.

As per your request, the above statements may be published in full on your website or may be published with Council's name.

#### **This letter is authorised by**

**Paul Tracey**  
**Manager Open Space and Environmental Services (Acting)**

Wollongong City Council  
Telephone