

STATEMENT IN RELATION TO BUSHFIRE RISK AT GINNINDERRY

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Minister for Planning and ACT Emergency Services Commissioner

On 26th of March 2017, Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA, at a meeting of the ACT Legislative Assembly Estimates Committee, asked the following question of the Minister for Planning, Mr Gentleman MLA and the ACT Emergency Services Commissioner Mr Dominic Lane:

“Do you agree with the current bushfire assessment which is informing the structure and design of Ginninderry? Do you agree that the current assessment is adequate?”

Minister Gentleman said:

“I can say that in our preparation for planning for new estates that could go near bushfire-prone areas the ESA works very strongly with our planning directorate and uses the most up-to-date data available for it.”

and Mr Lane responded *inter alia* as follows:

“Two critical elements of that are that the government has a decision in place whereby any new development in the territory needs to be built to the Australian standards. But to go over and above that the government has also amended emergency legislation and implemented policy through what is called the strategic bushfire management plan that allows the commissioner of ESA to set standards in relation to that as well. So should issues arise for new developments where my technical experts, particularly from within ACT Fire & Rescue and the Rural Fire Service, provide advice that additional standards need to be taken into account depending on the location, aspect and the like then we are in a position to do so. We work very closely, as the minister pointed out, with our other regulatory authorities to make sure we achieve that.”

The ACT component of Ginninderry obtained Minister of Planning approval in October 2016.

Ginninderry Bushfire Management Strategy

Planning for Ginninderry has included a focus on a detailed Bushfire Management Strategy. The strategy was prepared by leading bushfire expert consultants, working with academics and frontline service delivery agencies. The strategy includes a number of actions and planning requirements that will ensure that bushfire risks are managed.

The strategy report is available on the Ginninderry web site at: <https://ginninderry.com/planning-and-community/reports-library/> (click on “Bushfire”)

Ginninderry bushfire protection measures meet the statutory and policy requirements for bushfire protection in both the ACT and NSW - through application of the *ACT Planning for Bushfire Risk Mitigation General Code* and *Planning for Bushfire Protection Guidelines (NSW RFS)*. The protection requirements assume a worst-case bushfire attack scenario on a day of catastrophic bushfire danger (i.e. Fire Danger Rating of 100). The legislation is framed to ensure that, even in such a worst-case scenario, life and property will be protected.

The protection measures that have been provided in the form of planning controls at Ginninderry represent at least national best practice bushfire risk reduction.

Within the framework set by the over-arching controls, further detailed bushfire assessment to accurately prescribe setbacks, roading and landscaping at the local level is required for each stage of

subdivision, i.e. for each 300-400 block development application. These individual stage development applications will be lodged for approval periodically for the life of the project; this means that bushfire protection measures (and indeed other planning controls) will be subject to re-evaluation for each stage of the project. As detailed design occurs for each stage it will meet contemporary standards which will evolve as the project is developed over time.

Climate Change

As would be expected with a planning project of this nature at this time, Ginninderry has taken into account the likely impact of climate change on all aspects of the project. The Regional Climate Modelling (NARCLiM) project is a multi-agency research partnership between the NSW and ACT governments and the Climate Change Research Centre at the University of NSW. (the NARCLiM project is described in: *Australian Capital Territory Climate change snapshot, NSW office of Environment and heritage & ACT Government 2014*).

From the NARCLiM data it can be calculated that at Ginninderry, for the near future (2020 – 2039), the average number of severe fire weather days is likely to increase from the current average of 1.1 days per year to 1.2 days per year, and in the far future (2060 – 2079) to 1.5 days per year. Whilst any increase in the quantum of severe fire weather is a matter for concern these increases are able to be managed by the measures for fire management and protection that are proposed for Ginninderry.

Sharples Report

We are aware that a lobby group has commissioned a report which challenges some of the science and policy upon which the NSW RFS and ACT Emergency Services Agency assess developments. The report was prepared by Associate Professor Sharples, and we remain open to continue considering the insights and findings within it. As part of this, Riverview Group commissioned an independent peer review of the report. This review was conducted by Doctor Graham Douglas from the University of Western Sydney. Both reports were referred to ACT and NSW emergency service agencies for review.

The peer review process found that the modelling and assumptions in Professor Sharples' report are based on the application of an incorrect Standard (AS 3959-2009). Dr Douglas found that the Standard used in the report is not appropriate to use as a basis for assessing risk as it is not its purpose or intent. Any assessment of risk should be based on ISO 31000.

Importantly, Professor Sharples' report has not caused ACT or NSW emergency service agencies to reconsider any aspect of the proposed fire protection measures that they have required to be incorporated in the project planning.

With reference to the Sharples report in the ACT Legislative Assembly Estimates Committee hearing referenced above Mr Lane said as follows:

"I have not digested it as yet. I will be taking technical advice in relation to that, keeping in mind that we have worked very collaboratively with Jason on other projects in the past. The main thing we do, though, is work with the proponent as well in relation to their proposed development. If they bring forward an option, we will provide feedback early on in the case and say, "Look, we think that's too close to the bush. We don't like the type of structure you are looking to present. We think it needs to be a higher standard." We work early and closely with developers, whoever they may be, to ensure we influence the process early. That is what we have already started with Ginninderry."

The Sharples report and the peer review report are available at: <https://ginninderry.com/planning-and-community/reports-library/> (click on "Bushfire")

Ginninderry Conservation Corridor

An underlying planning principle for the Ginninderry project has been the requirement to ensure that the conservation area is not and will never be affected by the need for fire management measures put in place for the adjoining urban area. The conservation corridor is focused on the preservation of natural and cultural heritage values. The only fire management actions taken in the conservation corridor will be those related to the needs of the corridor itself.

Conversely, all fire management measures necessary for the protection of the urban area will be implemented within the urban area. This will include “asset protection zones” or buffers between the bush and housing. The asset protection requirements are prescribed by the relevant Government agencies – Emergency Services in the ACT and the Rural Fire Service in NSW.

CSIRO Research Collaboration

Riverview Group has also engaged with CSIRO fire expert Justin Leonard in order to, through a program of research and trial, further improve fire protection measures over the life of the project.

We will continue to work with a wide range of experts in relation to the important issue of fire protection across the life of the project. We will also continue to work with the Australian Red Cross, ACT Rural Fire Service and Volunteering and Contact ACT in implementing an ‘emergency ready and volunteer friendly’ action plan for new residents across all stages of the development.

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