

Bushfire Asset Protection Zones – practical application of the theory

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Project Background

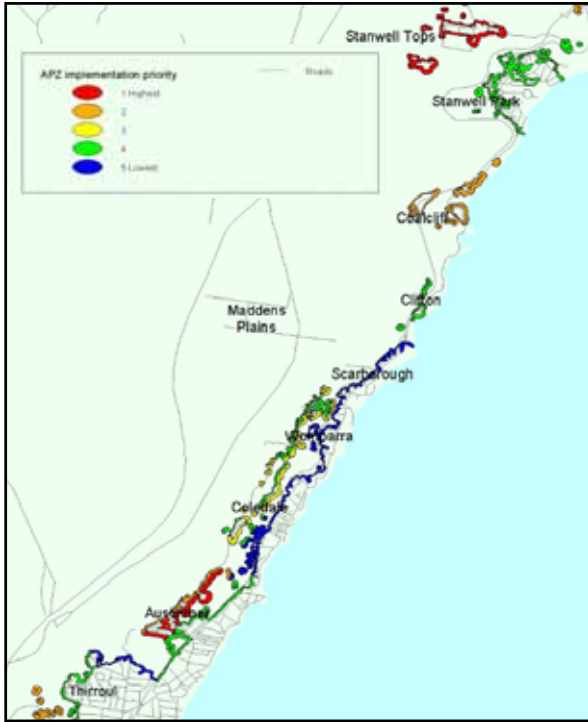
- Wollongong BRMP 2000 – APZs key mechanism to reduce bushfire risk across city
- NSW Rural Fire Service recent focus on APZs – “Planning for Bushfire Protection” and “Guidelines / Standards for Asset Protection Zones”
- Council initiated 3 stage program;
 - 1 – APZs – where and how big ?
 - 2 – Establishing APZs - Contractors
 - 3 – Maintaining APZs – Community Engagement

Stage 1 – APZs

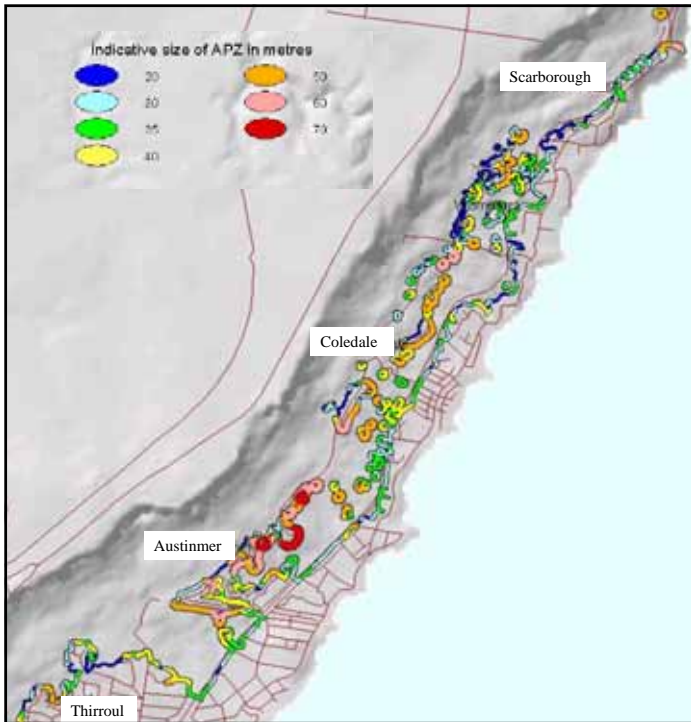
- Consultant study of urban – bushland interface across entire Wollongong LGA
- Interface mapped from 2002 aerial photos
- Computer model to predict APZ widths
 - Factors - slope, vegetation type, existing construction standards, RFS APZ distances
- Model predictions tested at 7 pilot sites

Stage 1 Results;

- Wollongong Bushfire Asset Protection Zone Risk Management Study 2003
- 282km² of interface between Helensburgh and Yallah required APZ establishment works
- Divided interface into 45 manageable segments
- Prioritised according to current bushfire risk – 5 priority levels (1 highest, 5 lowest)



**APZ
Implementation
Priorities Map**



**APZ
Indicative
Widths
Map**

Stage 1 Results cont.

Land tenure across the interface;

Private – 84.8%

Council – 13.3%

NPWS 1.9%*

	Private	Council	NPWS	Total
APZ Establishment	\$ 3.97M	\$963 000	\$175 800	\$5.1M
Maintenance 1	\$2.16M	\$509 850	\$90 050	\$2.76M
Maintenance 2	\$1.34M	\$301 300	\$52 600	\$1.69M
Maintenance 3	\$731 000	\$152 050	\$25 850	\$909 000
Maintenance 4	\$639 000	\$131 000	\$21 050	\$791 600
Total	\$8.11M	\$2.06M	\$365 350	\$11.25M

* Recent tenure changes mean NPWS have significantly more land along the interface

Stage 2 – Establishing APZs

- 45 segments - 5 Priority levels
- New Priority level every year
 - 2003/04 Priority 1 - 4 Council sites
 - 2004/05 Priority 2 - 7 Council sites
 - 2005/06 Priority 3 - 3 Council sites
 - 2006/07 Priority 4
 - 2007/08 Priority 5
 - 2008/09 all sites under full maintenance
- APZ project in WCC Corporate Plan – allocated approx \$200 000 per year until 2007/08 plus significant funding from NDMP

Stage 2 – Establishing APZs cont

- Two part process
 - (a) detailed specifications developed
 - (b) doing the work

Part (a) - Specifications Developed

- Refining principles from Stage 1 report
- Identify all Council sites within that priority level
- Inspect Council sites, determine APZ specifications, complete environmental assessments & HR Certificate (BRIMS)

Stage 2 – Establishing APZs cont.

Part (a) cont...

- Specifications for APZ establishment
 - Reduce fine fuels – ground and elevated to < 8 t/ ha
 - Remove shrubs / small trees under 150mm dbh
 - Preference for retention of rainforest / less fire prone species on site
 - Create Interface Control Line where possible
 - Protect environmentally sensitive areas – threatened species, creek buffer zones, bushcare sites, slopes > 18 degrees

Establishing APZs cont....

Part (b) Doing the Work

- Invitation to Quote process - bush regeneration companies
- Community consultation – Mail outs, street meetings with residents, consultants and RFS
- Contracts run approx 6 months
- Primary weed treatment, fuel management, secondary weed treatment, pile burns
- Extensive maintenance period included so sites 'manageable' at handover



Stanwell Tops – Before APZ
(area burnt 2 years prior in
Christmas Fires)

Stanwell Tops –
APZ established



Wombarra APZ (Priority 3 site in progress)



Stage 3 – Maintaining the APZs

- Crucial part of project for ongoing effectiveness
- Feedback during consultation – willingness to get involved by most people
- FiReady Program based on “Bushcare” model
 - Engage community – provide info, justifications for action
 - Support – training, equipment, regular BBQS, newsletter
 - Increasing personal safety, helping the environment, community involvement, RFS talks / inspections
 - 2 hour Monthly workdays
- 2 part time staff to initiate and manage “FiReady” groups



Challenges

- **Financial**
 - \$ to get started on process
 - Site contracts between \$50 000 and \$120 000 each
 - Overcome by Corporate Plan inclusion and significant grant funding (NDMP)
- **Consultants & Contractors**
 - New field, lack of competition / suitable experience
 - Partially overcome by training & information sessions
- **Community**
 - Translating talk into action – Council & the residents
 - Polarity of views – Red Vs Green
 - Burning the only way to reduce hazards
- **Changing APZ Distances** – RFS Guidelines / Standards

Points of Interest

- Collaborative Effort
 - Initial steering committee RFS, NSW FB, NPWS, WCC and consultant
 - Funding for Stage 1 from WCC plus State and Federal Grant for natural disaster research
 - Funding for Stages 2 and 3 from WCC plus grant from State and Federal Govt under Natural Disaster Mitigation Program
- Consistent approach required
 - Other Govt agencies and private land holders encouraged to adopt the APZ program through District BFMC and joint RFS / WCC community education programs
- FiReady Volunteers Survey – May/June 2006
 - high satisfaction with program and achievements
 - take on new projects / areas
 - lack of interest / participation by some neighbours