



## Your vegetation – what you need to know

Chair: Malcolm Hackett OAM

Panel members:     Dr Kevin Tolhurst AM  
                          Dr Justin Leonard  
                          Dr Peter Ashton  
                          Nick Guyett

### Chair

Peter and Nick you've been involved with some of these issues across the landscape in your area, have you got any things you want to add to that?

### Peter Ashton

Nick and I worked together for many years at Surf Coast, and I've just recently come over to DELWP. We have been involved at that kind of household level trying to take some of the science you've heard tonight from Kevin and Justin and trying to work with community in a sort of practical way.

One of the programs, and Nick might touch on this a bit later in Surf Coast, was to try and find these practical ways and bring the community on that journey. And when you think about it it's not that complicated, we just have to think about it how a fire would think about it when it gets to your place. And that's how I often think about it in those terms. If you're a fire where can you get to? What can you light up? And if you think about it that way often the answer is quite simple and there's some things you can do that make really big differences to sort of risk.

### Nick Guyett

A lot of the work we do is trying to work directly with community. We have a number of fuel reduction programs we've held up and down the coast. Where Council will remove fuel out of parts of our land that are close to houses and that are going to make houses susceptible, but we also ask householders to remove fuel from their land as well. Then we will pile it up at the front and we get our truck and chipper to go through and pick it up. In the past we've called it weeds to mulch because we targeted the weeds first. They're really easy one to take care of and often a significant source of fuel.

We've now got a couple of these that are actually community driven, for example Moggs Creek and another community nearby in Forrest. It's the community that drives this study they decide when and where and that sort of thing. They generally they organize themselves in a way we contribute by coming in the week after that they organize their action week. We'll remove the fuel for them.

We also offer individual property advice, we'll go for a walk and talk on a property and CFA offers this as well through their PAVs program (Property Advice Visit). I guess availability is always an issue. So, you'd have to talk to your own local CFA and your own local Council. We've got some real experts in this space they can point out those things that you may not recognize.

If your house has been built since 2009 and you're in a bushfire risk area check your planning permit. There's a good chance there might be some provisions in there around what the vegetation on your property is meant to look like. You're landscaping and the CFA and local Council will have endorsed this as best practice at the time.

So, if you're unsure where to start check your planning permit. A lot of people don't realize they've got this ongoing obligation.

Another thing as we go around, and we inspect pre-summer we sometimes issue fire prevention notices as part of an enforcement program. Now if you're getting a fire prevention notice from your local Council and if you're getting it repeatedly you need to have a look at what you're doing.

Even if you're not getting them every Council in Victoria has a municipal fire prevention officer who are generally a great source of information. We're happy to have a chat, give us a call, ask for some advice.

### **Chair**

Nick's last discussion really led towards that idea of neighbours - Fireguard groups or community groups working together. What other things have you done in the Surf Coast to get people to think about the sorts of vegetation?

### **Nick Guyett**

We've offered a plant replacement program in the past as well, swapping out those and as part of our fuel reduction programs there might be plants that are just inappropriately sited. But there's still space for trees and plants on the property.

There a fantastic list in one of CFAs publications *Landscaping your garden for bushfire*, Kevin showed it during his presentation. We copied the concept and produced our own, *Landscaping your Surf Coast garden for bushfire*. We also made a video on that as well so check that out.

### **Peter Ashton**

While some plants can be more flammable than others, some have a weaker structure, or more open structure and that's less conducive to the whole thing flaming at once.

We have used that to our advantage down in the Surf Coast where we've got some endemic plants. I'll give an example. A Banksia down here doesn't grow in a tight sort of bunch. It grows quite sparse. Even though the leaves are quite flammable the way the plants structured means it's not going to present a high risk.

### **Chair**

Rohan can you show us the results of poll number two please

### **Kevin Tolhurst**

We've got 60% of people saying removing the dead leaves, twigs and bark underneath the trees is the number one thing and that's exactly right really. Because it's that surface fuel that basically is carrying the fire. If you break up the continuity of that that prevents the spread of the fire to some of the other elements in the landscape. So, the reality is you ought to be doing basically all of those things. But the number one priority is getting rid of that surface fuel to break up the continuity and even in just the planning and design of your garden to make sure that you've got significant areas of no fuel anyway with paths, water bodies, roads and the like. So I really like that 60% of people have seen that how important the horizontal continuity is there by cleaning up that surface fuel.

### **Nick Guyett**

Kevin touched on it there, but the design of the garden is really important as well. The design will make it easy or really difficult to get in under those trees and shrubs to remove that loose dead material, so that's another thing to consider.