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A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR BUILDING ON OR NEAR BUSHFIRE PRONE LAND

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What do I need to know when building on or near bushfire prone land?

For those wishing to build your dream home and have discovered your land is mapped as bushfire prone; the development will have to comply with a whole new set of complex legislative requirements. I've prepared the following simple guide to assist you navigate and better understand the process:

A Simple Guide to Building on or Near Bushfire Prone Land

What are the Best Steps?	What do I Need?	Why?	What are the Benefits?
Preparation: 	Start early prior to drafting building plans and getting too far ahead in the planning and building process.	This will give you a clear understanding of your requirements and what you are likely to achieve on your site; this will allow you to make informed site specific planning and building decisions to achieve your development goals/dreams.	Getting it right from the start may increase first attempt approval success, potentially preventing siting and design issues, resulting in architectural changes, delays and/or costly mistakes in the planning and development stages which may have been avoided.
The Bushfire Risk Assessment Process: 	Get an on-site bushfire risk assessment for the subject site and building location.	This is a critical stage in your development process which enables the level of bushfire risk your development may be exposed to. It will assist in determining the 'Best' building location for the site, the associated 'Bushfire Attack Level' (BAL) and additional planning requirements including 'Bushfire Protection Measures' (BPM's) for the site. The clients wish list shall be considered throughout this process in addition to occupant safety, potential cost blowouts and other site constraints, e.g. ecology and aesthetic values.	To determine the relevant building and planning requirements and ensure legislative requirements can be met. This will assist town planners, architects/building designers environmental consultants etc. to provide more accurate fee proposals or create concept plans based on the results of the site assessment.
Analyse the Development Site & Surrounds: 	Conduct an on-site self-assessment (optional).	You may have heard of, or wish to conduct a self-assessment to expand your knowledge prior to engaging a Professional Bushfire Consultant. These enable you to assess the site yourself, to gain a basic understanding of what may be required for your development. However these are often not completed correctly due to the complexity of the bushfire assessment process.	Unfortunately the negatives outweigh the benefits. Like using other professional services e.g. town planners or architects etc. to guide you through the complexities, a professional Bushfire Consultant is no exception. Self-assessments are complicated and difficult to understand. A Development Application (DA) lodged with an incorrect assessment may be rejected by Council resulting in costly delays, changes to building designs and/or planning requirements etc.
Determine the sites Bushfire Attack Level' (BAL) & Bushfire Protection Measures (BPM's): 	Engage a Professional BPAD Level 3 Certified Bushfire Consultant to conduct a comprehensive bushfire risk assessment.	To determine the BAL rating, which relates to the level of construction and building materials to be used for the building. Other BPM's may also be required to achieve compliance, these may include some or all of the following: water, access, asset protection zones (APZ), landscaping, evacuation etc. If any non-compliance issues are identified at this stage, 'alternate solutions' may be used to achieve compliance.	You will get accurate results from a professional who will consult with the relevant stakeholders on your behalf (e.g. Council, client, RFS) ensuring your development goals can be realised. A 'Bushfire Report' or 'BAL Certificate' will be issued pursuant to your development application type. Non-compliance issues identified early on may be remedied by alternate solutions and the development may still proceed.
Documentation for Complying Developments (CDC): 	BAL Certificate - issued from a BPAD-Level 3 Certified Bushfire Consultant.	A BAL Certificate is required for complying developments on bushfire prone land which meet all the pre-determined planning and building criteria as legislated. A BAL Certificate can only be issued where the development is not in BAL-40 or BAL-FZ and meets the specified criteria. Only BPAD-Level 3 Bushfire Consultants recognised by the NSW RFS can issue BAL Certificates external to Council.	SPEED - Time is money: BAL Certificates can be issued very quickly, and 'Complying Development Certificates' (CDC) should be issued in 10 days from a certifying authority (Private Accredited Certifier or Local Council). The traditional Development Application (DA) process may take a month or more.
Documentation for Development Applications (DA): 	A Comprehensive Bushfire Risk Assessment Report.	The report shall form part of your submission requirements in support of your DA, and once you have all the relevant documents, you will be ready to lodge your DA with the Local Council. The bushfire report provides all the relevant information required to assist Council and/or the NSW RFS in determining approval for the proposed development. Bushfire Risk are trusted by the approving authorities; having developed a solid rapport with clients, stakeholders and staff in many Northern Rivers Councils and RFS.	Bushfire Risk have a highly successful approval rate. A professional Bushfire Risk Assessment Report presented by a BPAD-Level 3 Bushfire Consultant is looked upon more favourably than an application from another source. The information in the report may also assist your Architect, Building Designer, Town Planner etc. in determining the 'Best' outcome for your development based on our findings.
Determination: 	Patience.	Council may wish to consult with the NSW RFS and/or a 'Bushfire Safety Authority' (BFSA) may be issued dependant upon your development type. Refer to the 'Services Descriptions' for an explanation. However you're nearly there.	When your DA is approved you can start your development in accordance with the conditions of consent. Congratulations on achieving approval.