



# APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS FOR A BUSH FIRE HAZARD REDUCTION CERTIFICATE

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## INTRODUCTION

This document is designed to help you, step by step, to fill out an application for a Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Certificate.

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is committed to reducing the impact of bush fires on the community and the environment, and a key way to do this is by responsibly and effectively reducing fuel levels through bush fire hazard reduction work.

In the past, for private landowners, this has meant seeking a number of approvals from a range of government departments.

Under this simplified system a Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Certificate provides a single approval process for planned hazard reduction works.

Hazard reduction work can be successfully carried out in a number of ways, as described in Section Four. For more information please see the RFS document *Standards for Asset Protection Zones*.

For most private landholders, an RFS officer will carry out an assessment on your planned hazard reduction using the *Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code* and Bush Fire Risk Management Plan.

To apply for a Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Certificate you will need to complete an application form which is available at your local RFS or from the RFS website, [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au). The application will have to be signed by all owners of the property and then lodged with your local RFS Fire Control Centre.

There is no cost to either apply for, or to receive, a Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Certificate.

We will let you know if your work is authorised within a timeframe agreed with you when you submit the application. This can be as short as seven days.

When carrying out hazard reduction work the RFS recommends that you consider creating Asset Protection Zones. Asset Protection Zones are, as the name suggests, areas surrounding an asset, which are cleared and maintained to reduce the bush fire hazard. For more information please refer to the RFS document *Standards for Asset Protection Zones*.

*PLEASE NOTE: If your original Development Application provided for an Asset Protection Zone or other hazard reduction work you do not need to apply for a Certificate.*

*A Hazard Reduction Certificate is also not needed for agricultural activities that do not require environmental approvals, such as ploughing or crop or stubble burning.*

# HOW TO FILL IN YOUR APPLICATION FOR A BUSH FIRE HAZARD REDUCTION CERTIFICATE

When filling out your application please print neatly in BLOCK LETTERS with a black or blue pen only.

**IMPORTANT:** Complete your details carefully to avoid delays in processing your application.

## Section 1. Personal details

Fill in your name, postal address, contact numbers, and email address (if you have one).

These details are required if we need to contact you for additional information needed for the assessment.

## Section 2. Location of bush fire hazard reduction works

As the area where the work will be done may not be at the same location as in the personal details section, you need to supply an accurate description of the location of the land where the work is planned.

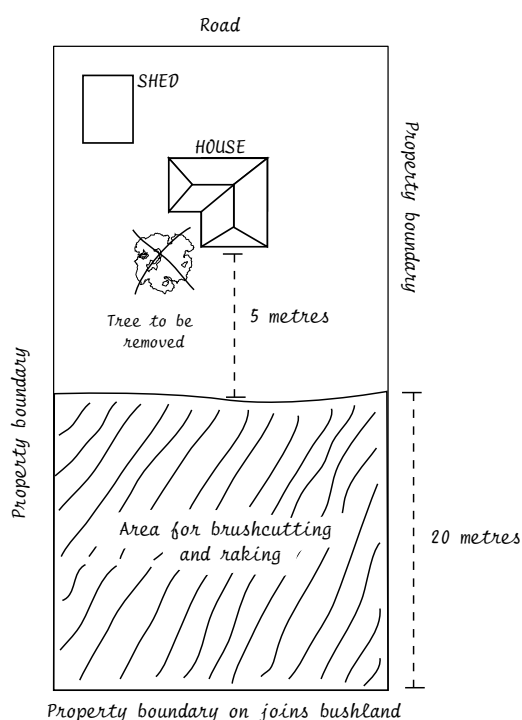
Please provide the street address, Lot and DP number (these can be found on your rates notice) and any additional information needed to accurately identify the property. The more information that you can supply the faster the approval process will be.

You must attach a map to the application. You can either provide a topographic map, a street directory map or a sketch on an A4 sheet of paper.

The map should show the area where the work will be done and the assets being protected. If you are using more than one type of hazard reduction method you need to show the location of each type on the map.

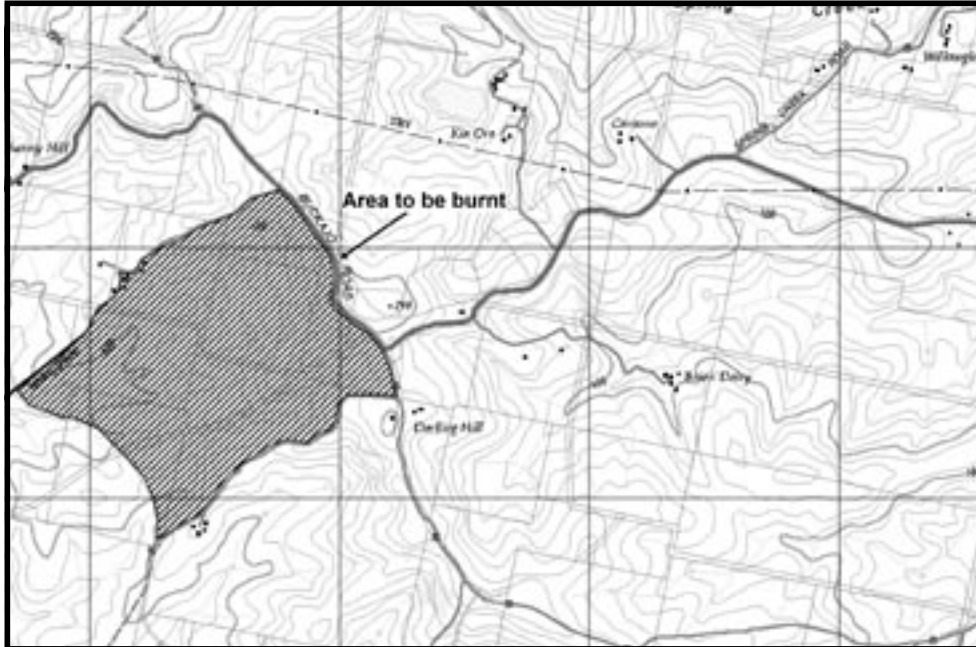
### Example A on neat sketch on A4 paper

If the area to be treated is only small then attach an A4 sheet of paper with a sketch of a map. The map should be as detailed as possible showing the area to be hazard reduced and the assets to be protected.



### Example B on Topographic Map

If the area to be treated is large, you will need to provide a photocopy of a topographic map and indicate the area of the work. Please give the name of the map used (for example, Mill MT. 9030-IV-S)



### Section 3. Assets being protected

In this section you need to indicate which existing assets the proposed hazard reduction will protect. Select the type/s of assets that are to be protected.

These assets can include:

- residential buildings
- special fire protection buildings  
e.g. schools  
hospitals  
child care centres  
retirement villages  
hotels, motels etc.
- major buildings  
e.g. farm sheds  
industrial buildings  
communication towers
- plantations
- boundary fences (a fence separating different properties).

## Section 4. Method of reducing fuel

There are a number of methods that you can use to reduce the level of fuel in an area. Some methods are even more effective when combined with others.

In this section you will need to indicate the method you plan to use to reduce the fuel level. Tick one or more boxes and indicate the size of the proposed activity.

Various methods can be used to create and maintain effective fuel breaks on your property. These include the following methods:



### A. burning

Burning off is an economical and simple method of removing unwanted litter and fire hazards from larger areas. However, it must be planned carefully and carried out with extreme caution. Burning should only ever be conducted under the appropriate weather conditions, otherwise there is a real danger that the fire will get out of control. More bush fires result from fires escaping when burning off than from any other single cause. For more information on the safest way to conduct burning off see the RFS documents *Before You Light That Fire* and *Standards for Low Intensity Hazard Reduction Burning*.



### B. hand clearing

Hand clearing is often used to remove or reduce fine fuels and leaf litter close to a dwelling. These hazards can be removed by hand tools such as rakes, hoes and leaf blowers and then disposed of (e.g. composting, mulching, green waste collection or pile burning).



### C. brushcutting/mowing

Hand held machinery (such as mowers and brush cutters) is very effective and often used to keep grass and other vegetation low.



### D. slashing/trittering

Large mechanical slashers including ride-on-mowers and tractortowed implements are another economical way to reduce fuel levels. To be most effective, the cut material should be removed or allowed to decompose well before summer. Slashing can leave grass in rows, increasing fuel in some places. Trittering or turbo mowing also mulches leaving the fuel where it is cut.

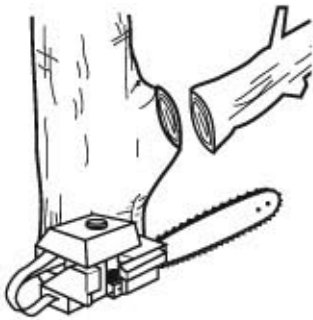
It is important to note that mechanical fuel removal is not permitted on slopes of greater than 18°, because of the potential to create soil erosion.



### E. ploughing/grading

Ploughing and grading can produce very effective breaks. Care should be taken as the loose soil may erode in steep areas, particularly where there is high rainfall and strong winds.

Again, to prevent soil erosion, ploughing and grading are not permitted on slopes greater than 10°. Generally, ploughing and grading will need to be combined with another method.



### F. tree pruning/removal

Pruning by thinning the tree canopy and removing branches that are over-hanging or are very close to a building can help significantly reduce the fire risk.

In most instances pruning will be sufficient to reduce the fire risk, but in some circumstances the complete removal of a tree may be necessary. However, Hazard Reduction Certificates cannot be used to gain approval for operations such as land clearance or circumventing other regulations such as Tree Preservation Orders for work that is not essential hazard reduction. For more information on what may be required see the RFS document *Standards for Asset Protection Zones*.



### G. pile burning

Approval for pile burning can only be given by the RFS for disposal of material that was removed during hazard reduction works. To use this method you may need to justify that you cannot dispose of the material by the normal garbage collection or re-use it on site (composting). For example, if the pile is too large; or access is too difficult to reasonably allow for removal; or for economical reasons.

To minimise smoke, the pile should be dry before burning. For more information, see the RFS document *Standards for Pile Burning*.



### H. windrow burning

The RFS can only approve the burning of windrows created from authorised plantation operations. The RFS cannot issue a Certificate for burning windrows created by clearing land (for example for development or agriculture). For more information see the RFS document *Standards for Windrow Burning*.

## Section 5. Proposed date

In this section you will need to give the date when you plan to do the work. If the application is approved, the Certificate becomes effective for a period of 12 months from the date of issue.

If you intend to burn during the Bush Fire Danger Period, or light a fire which is likely to be dangerous to any building, you will also need to apply for a Fire Permit. The Bush Fire Danger Period is generally from the 1st October to 31st March and may be varied by the Commissioner of the RFS. For more information see the RFS document *Before You Light that Fire*.

## Section 6. Time since last treatment

This section should only be filled in if you know when the last hazard reduction work was done in the area. This will help show the need to carry out the work. Indicate how many years since the area was last treated and circle the nearest year.

## Section 7. Last treatment

If you know, please indicate what kind of hazard reduction work was done in the area. Tick the appropriate boxes.

## Section 8. Has a consent or approval for removal of vegetation on this land been refused within the last three years?

Tick the appropriate box. If YES, please supply details. For example, has an approval for a tree to be removed been refused within the last three years and if so, please state when you sought the approval and why was it refused.

## Section 9. Provide details of any known threatened species, population or ecological community

Because some methods of hazard reduction can have a significant impact on biodiversity, including threatened species, it is important that you consider this as part of the application. If you know of any threatened species in the area where you are planning your hazard reduction work you must provide the information so that measures can be taken to reduce the impacts of hazard reduction.

When we assess the application the RFS will undertake a search of appropriate databases to check for threatened species in the areas, so providing this information will assist us in processing your application.



## Section 10. Provide details of any known Aboriginal or cultural heritage site or relic

To assist with the assessment process, if you know of any Aboriginal or cultural heritage sites you should complete this section.

## Section 11. Are you aware if the work is on land to which any of the following apply?

- A conservation agreement under division 12 of part 4 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*;
- A property agreement entered into under Part 5 of the *Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997*;
- A trust agreement entered into under part 3 of the *Nature Conservation Trust Act 2001*;
- A property management plan under Section 91 of the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*; or
- A property vegetation plan under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*.

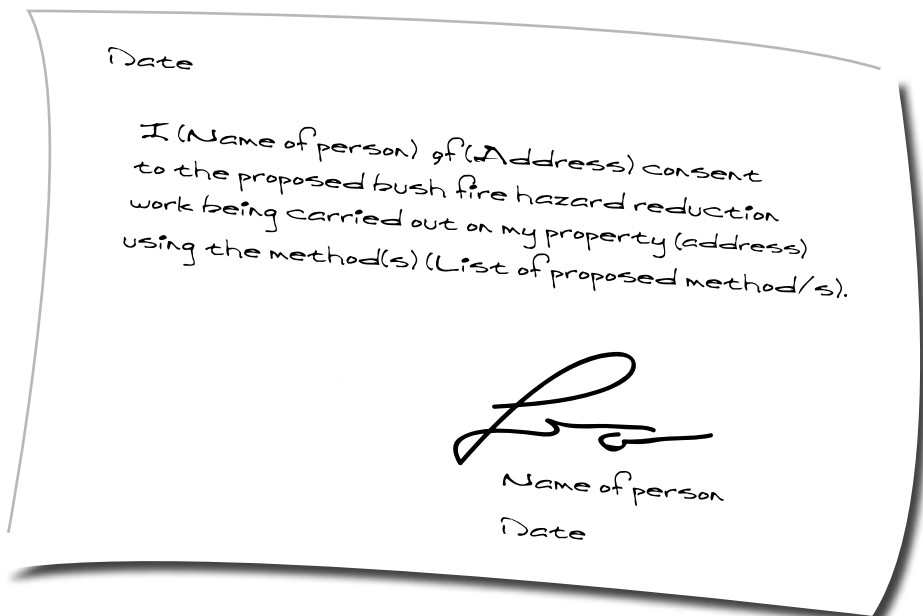
Some landowners may have entered into agreements with government agencies to ensure protection of environmental values on their land. Please tick YES or NO if any of the above apply. If YES, you will need to provide a copy of the agreement with this application.

## Section 12. Does the proposed hazard reduction require work on neighbouring land?

In the case of multiple properties being involved in one hazard reduction activity, one Certificate can be issued to cover all the work. However, the Certificate will only be provided if it has the approval of all land owners.

Please tick the appropriate box YES or NO. If YES, you will need to attach a written consent from each land owner authorising the work on their land.

An example of a typical letter of authorisation would read like this:



## Section 13. Authorisation and time for determination

Please ensure that you sign and date this section.

By signing you are agreeing that the information on the form is correct to the best of your knowledge.

The assessment period may be as short as seven days. However, because of the complexity of some proposals or because of the volume of applications, a longer period may be required. Please discuss this with an RFS officer when lodging your application. Circle either 7, 14, 21 or 28 days.

### HOW WILL AN ASSESSMENT BE MADE ?

When making an assessment the Rural Fire Service will consider:

#### **Areas of Statewide Significance**

Certificates cannot be issued in coastal wetlands, littoral rainforest and critical habitat as defined in the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. These areas require a more thorough environmental assessment before works can proceed.

#### **Genuine Hazard Reduction**

A Certificate can only be issued for hazard reduction works that are consistent with the local Bush Fire Risk Management Plan.

Certificates will not be provided for operations such as land clearance, domestic or industrial rubbish burning, or for avoiding Tree Preservation Orders or other regulations or ordinances.

#### **Smoke Management**

The RFS will consider whether smoke from the hazard reduction is likely to impact on the community. If so, conditions may be added to the Certificate.

#### **Protection of Creeks, Rivers and Wetlands**

The RFS will consider the best practice to minimise fire and exclude mechanical hazard reduction near the banks of rivers, streams and bodies of water, in order to protect river bank vegetation, water quality and to prevent bank erosion. Conditions may be added to the Certificate.

#### **Soil Erosion**

The RFS will consider potential damage that may cause soil erosion and slope instability, especially from mechanical methods of hazard reduction. Conditions may be added to the Certificate.

#### **Flora, Fauna, Biodiversity**

The RFS will consider the potential impact on threatened species and vegetation communities sensitive to various hazard reduction methods and minimum fire intervals for the type of vegetation to be hazard reduced.

#### **Aboriginal and Cultural Heritage**

Applications will be referred to the Department of Environment and Conservation by the RFS to ensure that sites of cultural and historical value are protected during hazard reduction works. Conditions may be added to the Certificate.

#### **Vegetation Clearing**

Consideration will be given to the minimum standards required to provide adequate fire protection while providing for the retention of some vegetation.

## ONCE THE CERTIFICATE IS ISSUED

Once the Certificate is issued you must comply with the conditions specified. If further notifications apply you are required to comply with them.

You have to advise the RFS once the hazard reduction is complete. Use the return form provided with the Certificate.

## STANDARDS FOR LOW INTENSITY HAZARD REDUCTION BURNING

The RFS has a helpful document with guidelines for low Intensity hazard reduction burning. This will help you control your burn so that the fire stays confined to the area where it's permitted and the effects of smoke are limited.

Please read the document *Standards for Low Intensity Hazard Reduction Burning* before you start the hazard reduction burn.

## STANDARDS FOR ASSET PROTECTION ZONES

The RFS also has a document with guidelines for clearing to create and maintain asset protection zones. This will help you control fuels, prevent soil erosion, and landscape around your home.

Please see the document *Standards for Asset Protection Zones* before you start your APZ work.

## WHAT TO DO IF A CERTIFICATE IS NOT ISSUED

The certificate application process is designed to provide a faster and more streamlined environmental assessment for most hazard reduction activities.

However, some environmentally sensitive areas may need more detailed assessments under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* or other legislation. For more details on what approvals are required contact your local RFS Fire Control Centre.

## HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

The following documents are available from your local Fire Control Centre and from the NSW RFS website at [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au).

- Before You Light That Fire
- Standards for Asset Protection Zones
- Standards for Low Intensity Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Burning
- Standards for Pile Burning

If you require any further information please contact:

- your local NSW Rural Fire Service Fire Control Centre. Location details are available on the RFS website; or
- call the NSW RFS Enquiry Line 1800 679 737 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), or
- the NSW RFS website at [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au).

**Produced by the NSW Rural Fire Service, Locked Mail Bag 17,  
GRANVILLE, NSW 2142. Ph. 1800 679 737**

[www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)