

# Media Release

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## BUSHFIRE RISK MISMANAGEMENT IN METRO AREA LEADING TO INCREASED HOUSING COSTS

Poor implementation of the State Government's Bushfire Risk Management Planning framework and lack of risk management on government owned lands is leading to significant and unnecessary additional costs to new home buyers, according to the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA WA).

"The government's focus on bushfire risk management in the wake of the devastating Perth Hills fires of 2011 is understandable," UDIA CEO Allison Hailes said. "But while risk assessment and mitigation measures may be necessary, they should be proportional to the real risk of fire in a particular area and private land owners should not be responsible for mitigating risk on unmanaged Crown land."

"Unfortunately, what we are seeing on the ground is lack of understanding and differences of opinion across government about how to measure the risks and this is resulting in increased and unnecessary costs, that are sometimes in the thousands of dollars for homeowners in the metropolitan area," Ms Hailes said.

"Since implementation of the new policy requirements, the development industry has experienced significant delays in approval timeframes, as well as incurring additional costs throughout the planning and approvals process that are arguably unnecessary in many instances," Ms Hailes said.

"All of these added costs flow through to the eventual buyers who then still face additional fire assessment, building and construction requirements, which in some cases are also unnecessary," Ms Hailes said.

"Put simply, this confusion is leading to unnecessary cost burdens on home buyers in Perth," Ms Hailes said.

That is why UDIA convened a forum today that included representatives from the Department of Planning, local government, the Office of Bushfire Risk Management and industry to discuss the implementation of the bushfire planning requirements and hopefully pave the way for significant improvements.

"Looking at the issues in more detail, we have seen that in some areas of the city, bushfire management requirements and associated construction standards are being applied to private land owners due to the risk from vegetation that exists on government land, such as the freeway reserves," Ms Hailes said.

"Government agencies should be responsible for managing the bushfire risk on their own land rather than expecting the owners of neighbouring land to pick up the cost burden," Ms Hailes said.

Rhys Kelly, President UDIA (WA) P: 9386 8080 M: 0418 941 774	Allison Hailes 0438 079 077
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“There needs to be significant review and streamlining of the policy to reduce the instances of buyers being required to undertake Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) assessments for newly purchased residential lots, which can cost between \$400 to \$700, after the land developer has already fulfilled all of the subdivision approval conditions,” Ms Hailes said. “Purchasers can find themselves looking at unexpected additional construction costs, which can amount to thousands of dollars, being enforced due to the supposed risk of grassland nearby that is earmarked to be cleared in the near future,” Ms Hailes said.

“This is after the developer has already instigated a range of measures during the planning and design phases of the subdivision prior to titling and sale of the lots,” Ms Hailes said. “This is a classic case of double handling and unnecessary red tape.”

“The problem is that while BAL assessments consider the risk of bushfire, they are not appropriately considering the context that it arises in. The ability to respond to a bushfire in Perth is significantly different to that of a rural environment.”

“Unfortunately at the moment many of the officers in charge of the BAL assessments have minimal experience with bushfire management or risk assessment and they are being overly zealous,” Ms Hailes said. “We need to bring common sense back into the equation so that the public is not paying extra costs for housing unnecessarily”.

**Ends.**

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