

HOTSPOTS FIRE PROJECT



Case Study: Reigniting interest for fire planning

After a history of close calls from wildfire, the Bucketty community take back the reins for managing their land through the Hotspots program.

LOOKING TO THE PAST

The residents of Bucketty know all too well what it means to have a close encounter with fire. The fires that swept through the Hunter region in 1994 stopped short of the township at an uncomfortably close distance. This was followed by the 2001/2002 fires that burnt extensive areas across the Hunter region, right up to Bucketty's doorstep.

While there is a history of severe bush fires in the area, parts of the landscape to the east of George Downes Drive (the main road) have not seen fire for at least 30 years, and fuels have since built up to high levels.

Recognising the risk of fire to the community, the local brigade has been keen to spread the word about the risk of fire, and how residents can prepare for the fire season.

Jerry Retford has been a Bucketty local for 10 years. As the Bucketty Brigade Captain, he knows his community well. He understands how the community values their natural environment whilst recognising the need to manage and mitigate fire risk. *"The Bucketty people love their environment and want to live in harmony with it. But they also know that they are at risk, and they want to feel safe"*.

Prior to the Hotspots program, *"the lack of property preparedness"* was of a real concern to the brigades. Few community members had completed a bush fire survival plan and Jerry felt that many properties were at real risk with the up and coming bush fire season.

Knowing their risk, but concerned about the impact that fire may have on the environment, the residents of Bucketty were keen to find out more about fire.

"Before Hotspots, people were environmentally aware, but they were on separate paths. Now they are united, and understand that fire can help"

Jerry Retford, Bucketty Brigade Captain



Hotspots sparks new interest

A biodiversity hotspot, with a community at risk from fire and people eager to find solutions, was the perfect mix for another successful Hotspots program.

The Hotspots program has acted as a catalyst for people to get involved with fire management. Jerry believes that the Hotspots program has given the community the tools they need to actively manage their lands to reduce risk and promote biodiversity. Now knowing that they can maintain biodiversity through burning, they are taking fire management back into their own hands.

At times in the past, the brigade has come up against a certain amount of resistance from the community towards hazard reduction works and prescribed burning. But now, Jerry is seeing a change in attitude, *"It's wonderful to now see people begin to understand that a well managed fire regime is vital for biodiversity, (the attendees) are so excited about being able to improve biodiversity on their own lands... What touched peoples hearts was that they can improve their environment through fire management"*.



A new way forward

Within 2 months of the Hotspots program being complete, the local residents are gearing up. Already, the local fire district has had 3 applications received from participants wanting to do hazard reduction burns for biodiversity, and local residents are banding together to prepare for fire as a community.

Residents of Bucketty are now planning for bush fire coordination at a very local level. After attending Hotspots and other fire awareness programs, Simon Perry, a resident of one of Bucketty's private roads, has completed a bush fire survival plan, a property management plan and has taken steps to prepare his property for bush fire. However, Simon feels that this is not enough,

"the reality is that the outcome of my plan is reliant on what my neighbours do". He is now getting his neighbours together and meeting with the local brigade with the goal to raise awareness and cooperation across bordering properties, and encourage people to prepare a bush fire survival plan.

Jerry believes that it is this sort of action with in the community that will get the message across to other community members to start thinking about how prepared they are for fire, *"They have seen through the workshop how one person on their own can't be as effective at mitigating bush fire as an entire road supporting each other."*

"Hotspots has brought it all together. People are saying "Now I understand why we need fire in the environment" and "Yes, I can do this". It is empowering people to utilise fire as a means of reducing fuels and a means of regenerating the natural bushland"

Glenn Byrnes, RFS Community Safety Officer

THE BUCKETTY LANDSCAPE

Bucketty is nestled in the hinterland of the Central Coast in the Sydney Basin. It spans the headwaters of Wollombi Brook, a major tributary of the Hunter River, the Wyong River flowing east to the Central Coast and the Deep Creek and Mangrove Creek catchments that flow south into the Hawkesbury River. The region is characterised by the prominent sandstone plateau of Yengo and Wollemi National Park. It is recognised as having high biogeographic and scientific significance, with large expanses of native vegetation, numerous rare and threatened species and high biodiversity.

Bucketty provides an important corridor linking the eastern seaboard through to the western slopes, via the Great Dividing Range and Wollemi National Park. A mix of vegetation types occur in the Bucketty area. Infertile upper slopes and ridges are occupied by Dry Sclerophyll Forests and Heathlands, whilst more sheltered and fertile sites are occupied by Wet Sclerophyll Forests and Rainforests in the deep gully pockets.

Bucketty is at the boundary of two Aboriginal Nations, Darkinjung and Wonnarua, and many parts of the adjoining Yengo National Park are of immense cultural significance.



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Further Information

Visit www.hotspotsfireproject.org.au or contact the Hotspots Fire Project on 02 8741 5555 (NSW Rural Fire Service), email hotspots@rfs.nsw.gov.au or 02 9516 0359 (Nature Conservation Council of NSW), email info@hotspotsfireproject.org.au

Credits

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