

Hon Lisa Neville
Minister for Environment,
Climate Change and Water
Email Lisa.neville@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Minister,

We write to reinforce the recent concern expressed by many members of the Wye River and Separation Creek Community over the felling of trees across the community.

The community of Wye and Sep is one that lives in the bush by the sea, so to lose the trees is a severe blow, akin to the loss of a house. As one resident has put it

For most of us with properties in Wye the natural environment is very important to us so to lose any more trees than absolutely necessary in the aftermath of the fire adds to the loss and grief. Unnecessary tree removal not only has unwanted physical effects eg erosion, effect on ecology but also major psychological and social effects. I am very concerned about the mental health of the community at this point.

We know that the landscape has and will change as a result of the fire, we know this rationally, but we perhaps have not as yet come to terms with it emotionally and this needs to be recognised by the agencies involved.

We appreciate and understand the need to have the clean-up completed before the heavy winter rains set in, however the rapid pace of the felling of trees seen to be dangerous has surprised and distressed people. Agencies need to better anticipate the impact actions such as tree felling will have on the wellbeing and psychological resilience of residents and recognise that agreements entered into in the early days after the fire were done at a time of shock and grief.

With hindsight a process similar to that adopted in relation to the clean-up of destroyed houses; whereby residents were able to discuss the clean-up of their block directly with Grocon; while taking slightly longer, would have enabled residents to participate directly in decision-making concerning the felling, pruning or retention of trees on their blocks. This would not only have enabled residents to understand the basis on which tree felling and pruning was being recommended but would not have added to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness following the fire. Indeed there are more

recent examples where individual property owners have had conversations with Grocon arborists prior to work commencing that have resulted in very positive outcomes and an increased sense of control for property owners.

While there is no question that dead and dangerous trees should be removed it does appear that there are different views held by arborists about the safety and removal of trees showing epicormic growth and when removal should occur. This needs to be clarified, especially as Commissioner Lapsley has recently indicated

The independent arboriculturalist report ... highlights a few considerations that Grocon and the Government will take on board, and indicates that more felling and treatment of trees should occur to reduce future public safety risks.

With the above in mind we request that the following steps be undertaken

- Grocon initiates a discussion with each effected property owner and an arborist and conducts an on-site evaluation of the trees before any tree removal or pruning commences on the block
- All dead and dangerous trees are removed
- Guidelines are developed to enable the risks and benefits of proposed treatment of trees with epicormic growth to be understood and assessed by residents in conjunction with Grocon
- Information is provided to the community on trees on public land that are to be felled – where they are and why it is necessary
- Develop and implement a planting plan for the community that is based on fire resistant indigenous trees and plants.

We also request that you and the responsible government agencies commit to proactively holding discussions with the community and directly with effected individuals on any major actions that may impact on the look and feel of the community or a person's property before they are undertaken.

Yours sincerely



Diane Sisely
Co-Chair and the Community Representatives,
Community Resilience Committee
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