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Mr David Appleton
Chair
MADRA

By email - mallacoota.district.assoc.2020@gmail.com

Dear Mr Appleton

Vegetation management Mallacoota

I apologise for the delay in responding to your correspondence. It has taken some time to confirm responses to some of the issues you raised. As I know you are aware, there are a range of views around the management of vegetation and fuel in Mallacoota, the protection of environmental values and the management of burnt vegetation.

Council recognises the important work the Mallacoota Fuel Management Working Group (FMWG) has done under the leadership of Lyn Harwood in engaging with the Mallacoota community and agencies to develop agreed approaches to fuel management.

I note that in relation to Mortimer's Paddock, the FMWG is continuing to work through an approach that protects the important environmental values in this area while also addressing the identified fuel related risks. There are significant obligations on Council and other parties to ensure protection of the Littoral Rainforest which is a listed ecological community under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Council will work with Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to implement an agreed approach that both manages fire risk and protects the environmental values, subject to confirming funding to support this work.

Similarly, in relation to concerns regarding debris accumulated along Lakeside Drive and recognising the range of views, Council is undertaking an assessment of this area giving consideration to both fuel risk and environmental values to determine a recommended course of action. Where this is beyond Council's available funding, we will advocate for funding to undertake the necessary works. Note that generally Council is only able to undertake very limited fuel management and clean-up of debris along roadsides, however we recognise this requires assessment in the context of bushfire recovery.

The question of Council removing burnt vegetation on Council managed land has also been raised now that it is evident some fire impacted vegetation may not regenerate, and that such vegetation is a reminder of the impacts of the fires to some people. We certainly acknowledge the impact these reminders can have on members of the Mallacoota community, however as you would appreciate, it is not practical to remove all reminders of the impact of the fires. Recognising the range of views in the Mallacoota community in relation to the management of vegetation, it is neither practical nor appropriate to remove all the fire killed vegetation. Such vegetation can also still play an important role as habitat.

Where it is established that vegetation is not likely to regenerate by itself, the vegetation can be assessed in line with previous and emerging habitat characteristics and restoration based on supporting vegetation development in priority areas. Necessarily this work will be targeted and focus on priority areas. Council has assessed and removed fire killed trees along roadways and walking tracks that have been assessed as hazardous. However, the nature of fire killed vegetation is that it will continue to deteriorate and may become hazardous over time. Council will continue to monitor this and respond to community reports. Where fire killed trees are assessed by Council as hazardous and posing a risk to roadways, walking tracks or similar, Council will take action to address the hazard.

You also note that some members of the Mallacoota community would like to take action to clean up debris on Council managed land. Again I am conscious that depending on the context there may be a range of views about whether material should be removed or not, and in particular that there is a need to identify and protect relevant environmental values, and that some environmental regulations may apply. Within this context, members of the community can seek consent from Council to undertake works on Council managed land. Most commonly this occurs through groups such as Landcare. I do however need to highlight that there are inherently a range of safety risks in undertaking vegetation works and so in general such works need to be undertaken by suitably trained people with the necessary equipment.

I am happy to continue to work through these issues, and I hope the above provides an initial response to the matters raised. Noting your advice about the community interest in these issues, we are preparing communications for our monthly recovery update, which is published in the Mallacoota Mouth.

Yours sincerely



STUART MCCONNELL
General Manager Bushfire Recovery