



Board of Management

Bushfire Inquiry SUBMISSION

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NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry  
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Dear Director

### **Submission on the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry**

This submission comes from the **Biamanga National Park Board of Management**, we are Aboriginal people who represent the aspirations of the Aboriginal Owners registered with cultural links and interests to the National Park. The Board members are representative of the descendants of 25 Apical Ancestors who have cultural association to the Biamanga and Gulaga National Parks and the connected landscapes to these two mountains. The Aboriginal Owners are spread over a considerable area of NSW and some of the other states in Australia, which means the Boards have the care, control and management of those lands on behalf of the Aboriginal Owners.

As a Board, we have considerable concerns for the wellbeing and recovery of Country in our area and across Australia, given the recent Summer Bushfires, especially those which swept through the Far South Coast of NSW. The impacts on our National Park (Biamanga NP - 83% or 11,342Ha burnt) and surrounding landscapes were severe. We are also concerned about the ability to carry out our obligations to care, control and manage these lands as Aboriginal owners.

As Aboriginal people of the Yuin Nation, we are deeply saddened by the impacts these fires have had on our people, our communities, our cultural sites, our resources and assets. With the lack of inclusion of Aboriginal people in Culture and Heritage space, (given there is a final Heritage Bill to be passed by NSW Government), Conservation and Land Management space, and ultimately Fire Strategies and Management, we were unable to protect our National Park to the scope that was needed. The intensity of the fires, the spread of the fires, and being Holiday season also prevented us as Aboriginal people in being able to have time for planning and being prepared to protect those cultural sites. Through the Governments lack of inclusion in these spaces, it has devastated not only our spirit, but has once again diminished our ability through cultural obligations to Care for Country as Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people lived and occupied (and still do) these lands and waters and cared for Country for many generations in a respectful and reciprocal manner, which involved many cultural and environmental practices, including Fire Strategy and Management in order to live with the lands and have balance between humans and nature. This is evidenced in already published literature, where authors researched historical information such as diaries, surveyor's maps, settlers' logs, etc. to support the Aboriginal people's management of land in Australia as seen by early settlers.

Since colonisation of Australia, Aboriginal people have been limited or, to an extent, been excluded from conservation and land management practices which benefit the land and environment to be healthy and in return give people and nature health and wellbeing. To not include Aboriginal people in land management is ignorant, given the knowledge and traditional practices that are alive and continuing through Aboriginal communities all over Australia.

On the South Coast of NSW we have been supporting the Aboriginal community to revitalise Cultural Burning Practices and support training our people to be Aboriginal Fire Practitioners in their communities, we believe that Aboriginal people hold the knowledge on how to best manage fire in such an arid climate like we have in Australia as we have done for thousands of years. Over recent times we have been working collaboratively with NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Local Lands Services, NSW Fire, NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils, community and other agencies to establish and grow opportunities to include Aboriginal people in Fire Strategies and Management.

We acknowledge there are legislations and Acts which manage fires in NSW and Australia, but we have seen the practical evidence of working in partnership (on the ground) with Aboriginal people to implement safe, culturally sensitive and environmentally friendly fire to bring back healthy landscapes.

We as a Board strongly advocate for the reform of legislative and structural approaches to Fire Strategies and Management in NSW.

We support the reinstatement of Aboriginal people's caring for Country systems and knowledges, within an Aboriginal led approach and framework. This approach would benefit the people of NSW, as well as the environment.

We call for long-term resourcing of Aboriginal led caring for Country initiatives and must be locally specific and culturally appropriate. Examples of local fire specific Aboriginal initiatives include; Bega LALC Work Crew, Wagonga LALC Rangers, Batemans Bay and Mogo LALC Rangers, Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation, Wreck Bay Aboriginal Fire Crew, Mudjingaalbaraga Fire Sticks Project (Shoalhaven), The Koori Firesticks Aboriginal Corporation, Murumbung Rangers Program (ACT), and there are many more local initiatives that exist and lots more who are interested.

In relation to the Board's experiences of Fire, there were many families who currently reside or had come to the South Coast on their annual family gathering and were directly impacted by the fires, the evacuations out of the region, emergency management orders and ensuring their loved ones were safe. The previous and current Board has been involved in training for Fire Management and Cultural Burns which have taken place on the South Coast.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry. We hope that this submission contributes to the development of more effective bushfire management.

Kind Regards

Mr Bunja Smith  
Chair Biamanga National Park Board of Management



Biamanga Aboriginal Cultural Area  
Alcohol FREE Zone