

Council Policy

Bush Fire Management

Policy Statement

This Policy sets out Council's approach to effective bush fire risk management and location based bush fire management throughout the Northern Beaches Local Government Area (LGA) in order to protect life and reduce the negative impact of bush fire on property, infrastructure and the environment.

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the Council's Bushland and Biodiversity Policy.

Principles

Council is committed to:

- Undertaking pro-active measures to protect life and property from bush fires.
- Partnering and engaging with the community to support them in understanding bush fire risk, appropriately managing bush fire risk on their property, and increasing their resilience to future risk.
- Supporting emergency services in bush fire prevention, preparation, response and recovery.
- Complying with all relevant legislation, standards, codes and plans including delivering Council's obligations under any applicable Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (Risk Plan), and the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC).
- Ensuring that future development appropriately incorporates bush fire protection and risk management requirements that are appropriate to their location.
- Planning for climate change impacts on bush fire using best available information in conjunction with the BFMC.
- Ensuring environmental impacts associated with bush fire management activities are appropriately considered, and avoided where it is safe to do so.
- Managing fire so as to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Policy Scope

This Policy applies to all employees, agents, officers, councillors, committee members, residents, workers and visitors of the Northern Beaches Council.

This Policy applies to all land owned by Northern Beaches Council or for which Council has responsibility as land manager, and to all private land within Council's boundaries. The Policy does not apply to National Parks, or Crown, State and Federal lands over which Council has no jurisdiction.

Land tenures within Council's boundary are outlined as per Figure 1 in Appendix 2.

Policy Application

Risk Management

As defined in the Rural Fires Act 1997, all land managers have a responsibility to manage bush fire risk and provide an integrated and best practice approach to minimising the impact of bush fires on the community and the local environment. On the Northern Beaches, bush fire risk can arise from smoke, radiant heat, flame contact and/or ember attack (noting that ember attack is the risk that affects most properties in this area).

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Implement actions within any current Risk Plan applicable to the Northern Beaches.
- Employ risk based decision-making using a holistic understanding of bush fire risk, including vegetation type, topography, data, vulnerability, capacity, and exposure.
- Prioritise efforts and resources to reduce risks that have the greatest potential impact, in consultation with the BFMC.
- Ensure Council's compliance with the Rural Fires Act 1997 and all other relevant legislation, standards, codes and plans as listed in the 'References and Related Documents' below so as to minimise the risk posed by bush fire to the Northern Beaches community.
- Support the community in understanding the continual threat that bush fire risk will pose, and how they can implement appropriate risk management while continuing to meet environmental obligations.
- Work with stakeholders that neighbour Council land to reduce vulnerability to bush fire impact – this includes the collective responsibility of State and local government, landowners, industry and the community, and collaboration between those stakeholders.
- Incorporate forecasts of future changes in bush fire risk when planning, resourcing and being part of the management of bush fires on the Northern Beaches.

Fire Management

Council will work collaboratively with members of the BFMC to provide an integrated approach to bush fire management across the LGA in accordance with the Risk Plan, Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) Plan and reserve-specific Fire Management Plans.

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Planning and preparation for bush fire management will be undertaken using all appropriate methods available to Council including but not limited to prescribed burning, maintenance of Asset Protection Zones (APZs), fuel load reductions and fire trail maintenance.
- Work with the BFMC to maintain the currency of the Risk Plan, FAFT Plan, Community Protection Plans and Council Fire Management Plans.
- Implement strategic fuel management works, including the preparation of control lines, so that Council and agencies, in particular the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) and Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW), can undertake prescribed burning in Council bushland reserves. This may include hazard reduction, ecological and cultural burns.
- Seek to integrate traditional & ecological burning practices and fire regimes into current practices particularly where it improves risk mitigation and environmental outcomes.

- In areas with existing development, Council will maintain APZs on Council land adjoining private properties in consultation with NSWRFSS. In the absence of prescriptive APZ widths, those widths will be determined in consultation with the NSWRFSS and/or Fire Management Plans that apply to the subject site.
- In areas of new development, Council will apply relevant State government guidelines/protocols to set APZ requirements and ensure appropriate APZs can be achieved on the land being developed.
- Identify, construct and maintain a network of strategic and tactical fire trails in accordance with the FAFT Plan to ensure vehicular access for fire suppression and fire management purposes.
- Ensure bush fire hazard complaints are referred to the NSWRFSS for review and determination, and implement and document any recommended actions in a timely manner.
- Assess the environmental impacts of proposed fuel management works prior to undertaking the works in accordance with the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code for New South Wales, or other relevant approval pathway.
- Ensure that burn planning considers potential impacts on flora and fauna, and that impacts are minimised by implementing on-site mitigation measures.
- Avoid impacts on Aboriginal archaeological sites by implementing on-site mitigation measures.
- Integrate Council's bush regeneration program and Bushcare volunteer program in a manner supportive of bush fire risk management objectives.
- Private land holders wishing to implement strategic fuel management works including vegetation removal, burning etc, shall ensure compliance with the requirements of appropriate regulatory authorities including but not limited to the NSWRFSS, FRNSW, NSW Environment Protection Authority, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (or their successors) and/or Council.

Community Engagement

The safest action to protect life is for people to avoid the risk. An engaged community is crucial to ensuring they are informed and actively involved in preparedness and responses to bush fire risk.

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Work with the BFMC and our partners and neighbours to ensure the community understands bush fire threat. This includes facilitating community engagement in bush fire prone areas on bush fire mitigation and management so that responsibility for bush fire management is acknowledged and appropriately shared through governments, agencies, industries and individuals taking individual and combined actions.
- Support our BFMC partners to facilitate residents' preparation for bush fire impact. Residents who choose to live in bush fire prone areas should have a bush fire survival plan and employ a range of management measures to reduce the bush fire risk on their property.
- Work with our BFMC partners and welfare service providers to identify vulnerable residents living on bush fire prone land, and provide information and connect them with relevant programs and initiatives.

- Increase and improve the resilience of our community by supporting and facilitating prevention, preparation, response and recovery activities for bush fire hazards as outlined in the State Emergency & Rescue Management Act, 1989 and associated State and Local Emergency Management Plans.
- Ensure that preparation and adoption of any revisions to the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Prone Land Map includes community engagement and communication.

Land Use Planning

The most important objective for strategic planning regarding bush fire management is to identify whether new development is appropriate, subject to the identified bush fire risk on a landscape scale as identified in NSWRF's *Planning for Bush Fire Protection: a guide for council, planners, fire authorities and developers, November 2019 (Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019)*. This Policy places a strong emphasis on strategic bush fire planning having regard to economic, social and environmental matters.

Council will apply the following approaches:

- Consistent consideration of Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019.
- Consider and be consistent with Council's Community Strategic Plan and Local Strategic Planning Statement and with all other relevant strategic planning policies (such as existing and forthcoming Local Environment Plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs))
- Reduce risk and increase resilience through effective land-use planning and building controls, supported by legislation, policy, guidance material and expert advice.
- Development applications for properties at risk from bush fire will provide for and accommodate adequate bush fire protection measures. Council bushland shall not be made available to accommodate bush fire risk associated with new development.
- Council's LEPs and DCPs appropriately manage bush fire evacuation risk by considering whether future development will result in an increase in people/properties at risk and/or an increase in the vulnerability of existing communities.
- Consistently review and update the Northern Beaches Bush Fire Prone Land Map. The latest Bush Fire Prone Land Map was certified on the 7th August 2020 and will be reviewed every 5 years.
- Support the NSWRFs by providing functions in accordance with the current District Service Agreement listed in the 'References and Related Documents' below.
- Support the BFMC to establish and maintain Neighbourhood Safer Places and Community Fire Units through the provision of appropriate Council land.
- Ensure that biodiversity and Aboriginal heritage data and mapping is integrated with bush fire management practices to avoid and minimise impacts on flora, fauna and sensitive sites wherever possible.

References and related documents

Related Legislation

- [Rural Fires Act 1997](#)
- [Rural Fires Regulation 2013](#)
- [Local Government Act 1993](#) and associated regulations
- [Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016](#)
- [Biodiversity Conservation Regulation 2017](#)
- [Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979](#)
- [Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997](#)
- [State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989](#)

Related Council Policies and Plans

- [Draft Bushland & Biodiversity Policy 2020](#)
- [Towards 2040, Local Strategic Planning Statement](#)
- [Shape 2028 Northern Beaches Community Strategic Plan 2018 – 2028](#)
- [Protect. Create. Live. Northern Beaches Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2040](#)
- [Northern Beaches Council Fire Management Plans](#)

Related Documents

- [Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020](#)
- [The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report 2020](#)
- [Warringah Pittwater Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2010](#)
- [Manly, Mosman, North Sydney Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2010](#)
- [Bayview, Ingleside, Elanora Heights Community Protection Plan 2013](#)
- [Cromer, Oxford Falls, Beacon Hill Community Protection Plan 2016](#)
- [Terrey Hills Community Protection Plan 2012](#)
- [Draft Northern Beaches Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan 2020](#)
- [Northern Beaches Bush Fire Prone Land Map 2020](#)
- [Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park Fire Management Strategy 2006](#)
- [Garigal National Park Fire Management Strategy 2006](#)
- [Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code for New South Wales 2006](#)
- [10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice for New South Wales 2015](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Planning for Bush Fire Protection: A guide for councils, planners, fire authorities and developers, November 2019](#)

- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Standards for Asset Protection Zones](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Standards for Low Intensity Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Burning](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Standards for Pile Burning](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, Bush Fire Survival Plan](#)
- [NSW Rural Fire Service, District Service Agreement, Warringah Pittwater District, 2010](#)
- [AS ISO 31000:2018 – Risk Management Guidelines](#)
- [Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Bushfire Glossary 2012](#)

Definitions

Definitions relevant to this Policy are as per the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) Bushfire Glossary as listed in the ‘References and Related Documents’ section above. A number of more specific definitions are included as an attachment in Appendix 1.

Responsible Officer

Executive Manager, Environment and Climate Change

Review Date

23 February 2026

Revision History

Revision	Date	Change	TRIM #
1	23/02/2021	Policy adopted by Council with minor changes following public exhibition.	2020/536391

Appendix 1 – Definitions

Bush Fire Management Zones: Bush Fire Management Zones are defined in the Risk Plan and includes the following four management zones:

- Asset Protection Zone (APZ);
- Strategic Fire Advantage Zone (SFAZ);
- Land Management Zone (LMZ); and
- Fire Exclusion Zone (FEZ).

Table 3.1 from the Warringah-Pittwater Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2010 is provided below as an overview of the purpose, objectives and characteristics of these zones. The definition of an APZ is further expanded below.

Zone	Purpose	Suppression Objective(s)	Zone characteristics
Asset Protection Zone	To protect human life, property and highly valued public assets and values.	To enable the safe use of Direct Attack suppression strategies within the zone. To minimise bush fire impacts on undefended assets.	As per RFS document <i>Standards for Asset Protection Zones</i> .
Strategic Fire Advantage Zone	To provide strategic areas of fire protection advantage which will reduce the speed and intensity of bush fires, and reduce the potential for spot fire development; To aid containment of wildfires to existing management boundaries.	To improve the likelihood and safe use of: Parallel Attack suppression strategies within the zone. and/or Indirect Attack (back burning) in high to very high fire weather conditions within the zone. To reduce the likelihood of: Crown fire development within the zone. and/or Spot fire ignition potential from the zone	Zone width related to suppression objectives and dependant upon: • Topography • Aspect • Spotting propensity • Location of adjacent firebreaks • Mosaic pattern of treatment Assess Overall Fuel Hazard (OFH) once vegetation communities reach minimum fire thresholds within this plan. Management practices should aim to achieve mosaic fuel reduction patterns so that the majority of the SFAZ has an OFH of less than high.
Land Management Zone	To meet relevant land management objectives in areas where APZs or SFAZs are not appropriate.	As per the land management and fire protection objectives of the responsible land management agency. To reduce the likelihood of spread of fires. To undertake mosaic burning	As appropriate to achieve land management e.g. heritage and/or fire protection e.g. broad scale mosaic burning objectives.
Fire Exclusion Zone	To exclude bush fires.	N/A	Variable dependant on size of fire sensitive area requiring protection.

Table 1 Warringah-Pittwater Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2010, Table 3.1 Bush Fire Management Zones: Purpose, objectives and characteristics

Asset Protection Zone (APZ): is a fuel reduced area on any land tenure surrounding a built asset or structure. This is primarily concerned with protecting both public and private assets such as schools, hospitals, community centres, retirement villages and residential dwellings, but may extend to other assets or infrastructure.

An APZ provides:

- a buffer zone between a bush fire hazard and an asset;

- an area of reduced bush fire fuel that allows suppression of fire;
- an area from which backburning may be conducted; and
- an area which allows emergency services access and provides a relatively safe area for firefighters and home owners to defend their property.

For existing development an APZ, its size and management will be defined in consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service, Bush Fire Risk Management Plan, and/or Fire Management Plans that apply to the land. For new development an APZ will be defined by *Planning for Bush Fire Protection (NSWRFS, 2019)*, as defined in approved development consent conditions.

Potential bush fire fuels should be minimised within an APZ. This is so that the vegetation within the planned zone does not provide a path for the transfer of fire to the asset either from the ground level or through the tree canopy.

Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC): Under the Rural Fires Act 1997 the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC) must constitute a Bush Fire Management Committee (BFMC) for each area in the State that is subject to the risk of bush fires. The BFMC provides a forum for cooperative and coordinated bush fire management in a local area. BFMCs are responsible for preparing, coordinating, reviewing and monitoring the Plan of Operations, the Risk Plan and the FAFT Plan for their area.

Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (Risk Plan): Is a strategic document that identifies community assets at risk and sets out a five-year program of coordinated multi-agency treatments to reduce the risk of bush fire to the assets. Treatments may include such things as hazard reduction burning, grazing, community education, fire trail maintenance and establishing Community Fire Units. Each BFMC is required to prepare and submit to the BFCC a draft Risk Plan for approval. Each Risk Plan is reviewed every 5 years.

Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan (FAFT): The aim of the FAFT is to provide appropriate means of accessing land to prevent, fight, manage or contain bush fires. The document identifies a suitable network of fire trails across a BFMC area, which includes both existing and proposed fire trails and access points. Each BFMC is required to prepare and submit to the BFCC a draft FAFT for approval. Each FAFT is reviewed every 5 years.

Fire Management Plan: Council from time to time creates detailed fire management plans for individual reserves that assist in determining burn programs, asset protection zone configurations and the like. They can be a useful tool in integrating many of the site specific requirements that need to be considered when managing bush fire risk at a local scale.

Bush Fire Prone Land Map: It is a requirement under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* that a map be produced for each Local Government Area to which a Risk Plan applies recording all land within the area designated by the Commissioner of NSW RFS that is bush fire prone land.

An area identified as bush fire prone land is land that can support a bush fire or is likely to be subject to bush fire attack, including ember attack. Special construction standards and development restrictions apply to areas mapped as bush fire prone land in NSW. Each Bush Fire Prone Land Map is reviewed every 5 years.

Fire Fighting Authorities: The NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Forestry Corporation of NSW.

Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code: A streamlined environmental assessment process per the requirements of the Rural Fires Act 1997 for use by issuing authorities and certifying authorities in determining bush fire hazard reduction certificates.

Planning for Bush Fire Protection: A document prepared by the NSW Rural Fire Service that sets out the bush fire management requirements for developing on bush fire prone land. It represents the current best available science and research, industry standards and technology regarding bush fire protection measures required for development.

Special Fire Protection Purpose (SFPP) Development: In NSW Special Fire Protection Purpose (SFPP) developments have been identified as:

- A school;
- A childcare centre;
- A hospital (including a hospital for the mentally ill or mentally disordered);
- A hotel, motel or other tourist accommodation;
- A building wholly or principally used as a home or other establishment for mentally incapacitated persons;
- Housing for older people or people with disabilities within the meaning of State Environment Planning Policy (Seniors Living);
- A group home within the meaning of State Environment Planning Policy (Group Homes);
- A retirement village; and
- Any other purpose prescribed by the regulations (Section 100B (6) of the Rural Fires Act 1997).

Community Fire Unit (CFU): A Community Fire Unit (CFU) is a team of local residents living in an area close to the bushland interface who are supported by the relevant fire agency to enhance their safety and resilience to bush fires. Residents are provided some basic firefighting equipment and learn how to prepare themselves, their family and home ahead of the bush fire season helping to make an informed decision whether to leave early or stay and defend their property.

Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP): A Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP) is a building or an open space that may provide for improved protection of human life during the onset and passage of a bush fire. It is a location where people facing an immediate threat to their personal safety can gather and seek shelter from the impact of a bush fire. Their function is to provide a place of last resort for a person to seek shelter at during the passage of the bush fire front. An NSP forms part of a person's backup plan, to be utilised where their intended actions in the face of a bush fire are unable to be implemented or have failed. NSPs are designated by the NSW Rural Fire Service in consultation with relevant owners/operators of potential NSPs.

Community Protection Plan (CPP): A Community Protection Plan (CPP) is a more detailed tactical bush fire planning document prepared at a community level. CPPs provide the public, fire services and land management agencies with easy to understand information that is specific to a community. A CPP consists of three maps with supporting documentation. It presents an overview of the bush fire threat for the area, the protection options available to the community as well as the current and proposed risk treatment works. The CPP also captures any locally important information, including the location of Special Fire Protection Purpose assets, which can be used by local brigades and emergency services during pre-incident planning exercised and fire fighting operations. CPPs are prepared by the NSW Rural Fire Service in consultation with the Bush Fire Management Committee.

Bush Fire Survival Plan: A Bush Fire Survival Plan is a plan developed by residents on what actions they will undertake to protection themselves, their family and property during a bush fire. A Bush Fire Survival Plan typically considers what to do if a bush fire threatens your home; how to prepare your home and get it ready for bush fire season; knowing the bush fire alert levels; and how to stay up to date with conditions as they change.

Appendix 2 – Land Tenure

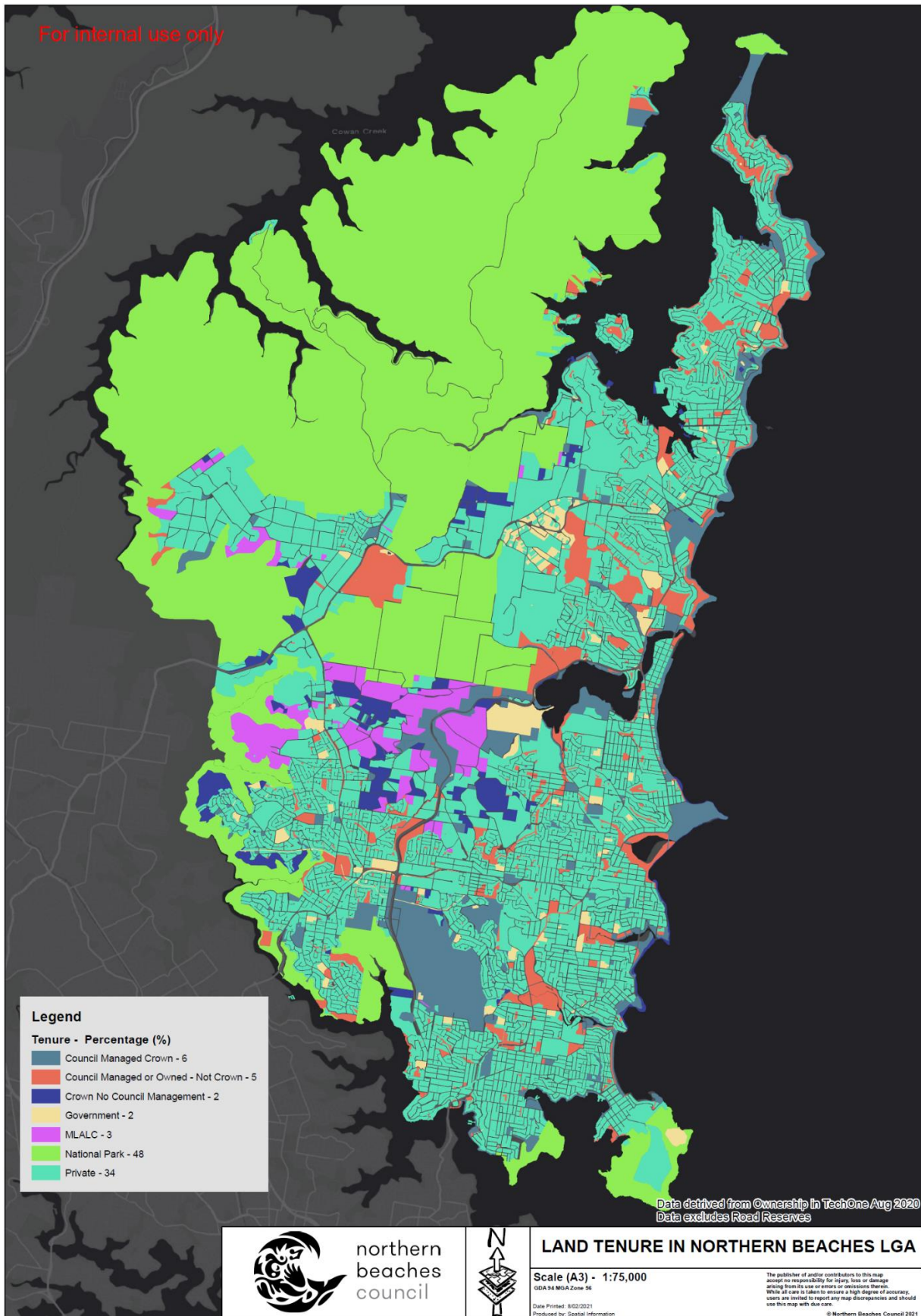


Figure 1 Land tenure breakdown throughout the Northern Beaches Local Government Area