



# Sutherland Shire Environment Centre

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Sutherland Shire Council  
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Dear Sir/Madam,

## **Submission re Temporary Access across Fire Trails and Reserves Policy Review**

I write on behalf of the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre [SSEC] which is a not-for-profit community organisation seeking to protect and enhance the natural environment of the Sutherland Shire and neighbouring localities. Our campaigns can be reviewed on our website for more information.

I refer to the Sutherland Council document titled Temporary Access across Fire Trails and Reserves Policy Review dated October 2025 prepared by the Assets Strategy & Delivery Division. This publication lists three purposes of which the first and prime purpose is stated as follows:

To facilitate requests from members of the community for temporary access across community land, including fire trails and reserves, for the purposes of carrying out commercial and private building works on adjoining land, or to remove waste associated with the works.

Section 2 of the Document was more specific stating

This Policy applies to requests received from the community for temporary access across community land, including fire trails and reserves, to transport building materials and equipment required in relation to commercial or private building works that are being carried out on adjoining land or to remove waste that is consequential to such works.

SSEC opposes this for the following reasons.

Community Land is designated for community use and should not be used in part or for any amount of time for other purposes. This especially applies to any fire trails and reserves and certainly should preclude access for the purposes of carrying out commercial and private building works on adjoining land.

Community land including reserves should not be available as a corridor for commercial or private building construction for the benefits of adjacent owners. As property prices increase with new constructions and developments, any owners using community lands to achieve this are benefitting from the public purse with no financial costs levied. There is no proposal in this policy to levee private landowners for access to their properties across community lands. This in itself is unacceptable.

Any commercial and private building works should work within the constraints of the property upon which any development is to take place as it does in areas so zoned. Community parks do not suffer access and possession of portions of their space for the transportation of building materials and equipment for the purposes of carrying out commercial and private buildings so neither should community land.

It is concerning that the Policy Review does not specify a proposed time limit for access. A building requiring a year or more construction could well cause a daily parade of construction vehicles intruding onto community land whether on fire trails or other portions of the community land. The so-called temporary access equates to open slather.

Transportation for commercial or private building works involves a great many movements of a large diversity of vehicles. The imposition of this on public roads is a nightmare and the proposal to allow this onto community lands is outrageous.

Construction of buildings both commercial and private requires transportation for excavation, demolition and earth moving with industrial machinery including bull dozers and bob cats and heavy trucks. It requires the deliveries of multitudes of building materials including cement from cement trucks, heavy earth consolidation machinery, plumbing equipment, electrical equipment, air conditioning, computer equipment, heating, solar and hot water installation, painters and perhaps sign writers. As well as this, personnel including architects, surveyors, engineers, builders, plumbers, electricians and workers supplying equipment associated with the construction are more than likely to use new access through community lands with no supervision from council staff.

The environmental risks of allowing the transportation as outlined above across community land including reserves is totally unacceptable.

A special concern is raised for council reserves with prime biophysical habitat adjacent a site requiring construction. All manner of vehicles associated with the project would be authorised to cross the space up to and adjacent to the construction site. This would cause damage and levelling of the vegetation and killing any fauna in the way. The damage to the ground cover would immediately open those areas to weed infestation whose seeds would be delivered on the tyres of the vehicles involved. Once provided a habitat, the weeds flourish and the personal causing the damage do not have the time or the capacity to properly remove them.

The Council policy only mentions the removal of wastes associated with the works and totally ignores the very great problem of introduced weeds and also the proper restoration of native habitat after construction. Exotic vigorous weeds include Lantana camara, Croftan weed, Turkey Rhubarb and thistles.

Transportation in sensitive community lands would cause mechanical weathering of surface rocks and erosion of soils through vehicle movement slippage and skidding plus any loss of vegetation during a build would expose soils to erosion by wind and running water. Where water cannot drain, mudholes and bogs would emerge. Vehicle imposition would also cause soil compaction leading to

the death of vegetation. Where water can runoff it will carry siltation into local streams adversely affecting water quality and turbidity thereby harming the ecology of the waterway. None of this is quickly repaired.

Safety of residents in Community Lands is very important. The implementation of this policy would mean residents using the community land fire trails would have to negotiate the range of vehicles described above including heavy cement trucks on one hand and fast-moving four-wheel drive utilities driven by tradies always in a hurry on the other. All of these take up disproportionate amounts of space on fire trails.

Fire trails on Community lands also provide quick access for emergency vehicles and prominently Fire Fighting vehicles. Opening community Fire trails for private access initiates the potentially unwanted circumstance of a private vehicle or a contractors vehicle blocking access to emergency vehicles. Dumped vehicles would also be an immediate hazard and they may even be set alight creating fires.

Allowing temporary access for private works will embolden other undesirable users onto the Community lands. Where gates protect these lands having them open for construction periods will enable easy unauthorised access by mountain bikes, e-bikes, trail bikes, private vehicles including SUVs and four-wheel drive enthusiasts. Some vehicles may be conveniently dumped as well. Council staff are already spread thinly and further enforcement in this regard would be taxing and ineffective.

The amenity of Community lands involves the setting and the tranquillity. This would be violated where ever construction vehicles are authorised.

SSEC also agrees with the concerns raised by the Woronora Valley Residents Association regarding this proposal. In particular for more than 25 years local legend the late Norm Dixon OAM led community action fighting to keep the Woronora Fire Trail closed to private access. His contribution was nationally recognised and the Norm Dixon Reserve was named after him. It is especially important that this Fire Trail of the Crescent at Woronora remains closed at all times as a mark of respect for him and the long community efforts to conserve this link through the wildlife corridor of the valley.

By way of conclusion, Community lands are set aside for community use and they should be respected as such and they should not be used as a road access for developers and land owners in order to produce their financial gains through property development. The policy proposed no levees or costs for private access for constructions and no time limits. It amounts to private exploitation of community assets. Guidelines for numbers and types of vehicles allowed are not specified. The environmental damage wrought on community lands would be great. No guidelines are specified for prevention of harm and destruction to native vegetation, none for ecological disturbance, none for prevention of soil erosion and none to prevent weed infestation. The amenity of community lands would be lost during constructions. Safety of community users is also sacrificed and unwanted users will be provided with free entry. Emergency vehicles may also suffer blockage or hazards where the policy is allowed. Council should especially keep the Fire Trail of the Crescent at Woronora closed as a mark of respect to the community and to protect the wild life corridor and to preserve the amenity of the area.

In short, this policy is for the benefit of private land owners at a cost to the community and the environment and there are a multitude of reasons not to proceed with it.

Yours sincerely

Ian

Ian Hill  
SSEC Chair

