

Open Pile Burning Draft Policy Engagement Summary



Between Friday 10 October and Friday 14 November 2025, Council sought feedback on the draft Open Pile Burning Policy.

The draft Policy outlines Council's moral and legal responsibility to manage open pile burning in a way that protects human and environmental health.

Community members were invited to provide feedback by completing the online submission form via Your Voice Our Coast, through which Council received a total of 46 submissions.

Key themes from the engagement include:

- The **burning hours** for open pile burning with many respondents criticising the proposed burning times.
- The proposed **pile size** for open pile burning being too small.
- Concerns about the proposed **time frame for extinguishing** open pile burning fires.
- The proposed **removal of wood debris**.

These key themes are further analysed in this Engagement Summary.

Sentiment about the draft policy

There were 46 responses to the draft policy for Open Pile Burning.

Community feedback revealed that 35 respondents were against the draft policy for various reasons and ten people supported the draft policy. One submission did not comment on the draft policy.

How you connected



A total of **46** online submissions and **1** written submission



The draft policy was downloaded **318** times



Your Voice Our Coast **2,429** views



Facebook – **121,533** people were reached, generating **357** interactions



Email sent to **327** Your Voice Our Coast subscribers



eNews story - Delivered to **20,102**

Engagement overview

The draft policy was supported by respondents (n=10) for health reasons and that open pile burning was a practical tool for protecting lives, property and the environment.

"I strongly encourage Council to consider banning pile burning due to health risks associated with wood smoke. Numerous studies have confirmed that the particulate matter in woodsmoke poses numerous health risks, including cancer, heart attack, and asthma."

"We can't hang clothes out and have purchased air cleaners for inside due to severe asthma."

"Open pile burning pollutes the neighbourhood."

"Any form of open pile burning should be banned for health and environmental reasons."

"Pile burns – when performed safely, legally and responsibly – are a practical and effective tool for protecting lives, property and the environment on the Central Coast."

"Council now has an opportunity to adopt a stronger, more evidence-based policy that protects vulnerable residents and the environment and encourages sustainable alternatives to burning."

As previously mentioned, most respondents (n=35) did not support the draft policy. General comments included:

"The amendments to the pile burn policy are completely unrealistic for those of us on larger properties."

"I think landowners should be able to pile burn without having to put a submission on for approval."

There were four key themes cited for the rejection of the draft policy – the proposed burning hours, the size of an allowed pile burn, the proposed time for extinguishing open pile burning fires, and a policy clause relating to the removal of woody debris. The themes are outlined below.

Burning hours

A consistent theme from respondents (n=24) related to the proposed Clause 4.17 in the draft policy that outlined the hours of 7am and 10pm for open pile burning. Respondents were concerned that the proposed operating hours ignored weather conditions and that night brings cooler weather with higher humidity making it safer to burn.

"Clause 4.17 will remove the opportunity to light fires when conditions are ideal due to nightfall."

"Council should consider after 10pm burning time for open pile burning."

"There should be allowances for fires after 10pm."

"Burning between 7am-10pm is unrealistic. Conditions at our home are often better to burn overnight. We always ensure that any pile is in a well cleared paddock away from buildings and vegetation and it is predominantly out by late evening."

"These items remove the opportunity to light fires when conditions are ideal purely due to nightfall. There are times when nightfall brings cooler conditions and increased humidity therefore reducing risks."

Pile size

Another criticism of the draft policy was the proposed size allowed for open pile burning. Respondents (n=27) said the pile size is too small especially for those living on large acreage.

"It's impossible to cut tree stumps into 150mm pieces. Tree stumps can take days to burn."

"The expectation that all matter be less than 150mm is unrealistic. Nobody is going to chop a tree into pieces that small to burn it."

"Policy should allow larger than 150mm size wood to be burned."

"I object to the pile size restriction being proposed, this should be left up to the discretion of the property owner, otherwise with this restriction the large properties will be burning every day to be able to effectively manage their properties from the potential catastrophic fire events that are predicted with climate change."

Proposed time for extinguishing open pile burning fires

Respondents had strong feelings about Clause 4.18 which proposed that all fires must be extinguished between 10pm and 7am.

"It's not practical for landowners to extinguish their fire before 10pm as the weather is often better after 10pm burning."

"Evening dew point helps dampen fires and contain them. Nighttime burning creates less hazards and inconvenience to neighbouring properties."

"The evening dew point is a good method of dampening fires and helps in containing them. Nighttime burning also creates less hazards and inconveniences to neighbouring properties. A time-honoured practice should not be forgotten."

"If we have to extinguish the fire at 10pm, how are we going to light it again the next day when it still wet? If we can't complete the burn, we are left with potentially danger materials when we get another severe bush fire season."

"Having to completely extinguish a fire is an unrealistic expectation. Particularly for rural properties where water isn't always freely available."

Wood debris and clearing native vegetation

Clause 4.23 in the draft policy states that burning wood debris or clearing native vegetation is not allowed. It prompted several comments against the policy clause.

"Woody debris damages native vegetation and fire is used to remove woody debris."

"Many landholders and residents want to clear dead woody debris with the aim to reduce the fire hazard to property, livestock and residents."

"These new rules will make it incredibly hard to maintain our property as we have just moved to this property and it is very overgrown and has a lot of vegetation that needs to be taken care of."

"The clause is contrary to the need to reduce the on-ground combustible fuel load."

"Woody debris that supports rabbits, feral cats and foxes is a major concern e.g. Lantana etc... exotic, toxic and evasive, it damages native vegetation habitats. Fire is one of the tools we use to remove this weed."

"Promoting native vegetation to return with the native animals. Over 40% of our property in native bush and we take our responsibility to keep it that way, a constant battle. Most rural residents will need to some extent to clear dead woody debris."

Other viewpoints

Respondents also had viewpoints on Clause 4.10 relating to having sufficient a water supply and a hose with appropriate water pressure and length to extinguish the fire if required.

"I object to the requirement for hose and water. Council has not connected water to all properties so this requirement cannot be policy."

"How will I always ensure that a hose and water is close by when I don't have taps everywhere on my property? These things need to be changed."

Community suggestions

Despite most respondents being against the draft policy, they offered many suggestions to make the policy more workable for them. These suggestions included making a distinction between rules for metropolitan and acreage properties.

"There should be a practical distinction between acreage and suburban properties to allow us to better manage the bushfire risk to ourselves and the community."

"The current and proposed policy changes are entirely sensible for suburban and residential blocks, but they simply don't provide support for the larger properties."

One respondent suggested the idea of 'slow burning' as an alternative to open pile burning for woody debris.

"I think the effect of the current prohibition of clearing and burning woody debris is contrary to the protection of native wildlife. This is because by adapting the indigenous method of 'slow burning' enables wildlife to escape an oncoming fire and thus eliminate the chief cause of native animal destruction which is a more intensive fire which occurs when such woody debris builds up in a native forest."

Five respondents offered practical advice regarding open pile burning in relation to the application process, notifying neighbours, and an alternative to open pile burning.

"An application to pile burn should be made in conjunction with the RFS via the Council website customer portal."

"Give 24 hours' notice to neighbours and the RFS (or Fire & Rescue NSW if not in a Rural Fire District)."

"Let's stick with RFS procedures and notify them and your neighbours of a burn and be sensible like having fire control systems on hand ready to act if the weather changes."

"Alternatives to open burning including six free bulk green waste kerbside collections per property are readily available but seldom used."

"It can be more practical to burn multiple piles in one day, that way all the burning is done at one time and not dragged out for 2 weeks."

Additional practical suggestions included reducing hazard reduction time to five years, using the evening dew point to dampen fires and providing community education on how to turn waste into topsoil.

"Also, ten-year hazard reduction time needs to be reduced to five years. This will help eradicate noxious weeds and allow the bush to recover. Property owners should be allowed to undertake this if they have necessary training and it does not join another bush land/lot."

"The evening dew point is a good method of dampening fires and helps in containing them. Nighttime burning also creates less hazards and inconveniences to neighbouring properties. A time-honoured practice should not be forgotten."

"Better still would be an education policy teaching people how to create Hugelkultur beds to turn this "waste" into rich topsoil, or a collection system that allows Council to mulch this waste and turn it into a useful product."

What's next?

Council is currently reviewing all feedback received during the public exhibition. The key themes identified through this consultation are also relevant to other State Government agencies, whose advice Council relies upon. As part of the feedback process, consideration will be given to the development of the Policy and the preparation of a report for Council.

Find out more and stay up to date at

Your Voice Our Coast