

Opening Welcome Address

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I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and to extend my thanks to Uncle Allen Madden for his Welcome to Country. I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary for the Police and Emergency Service for his presentation and for his kind words about the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC). I would also like to thank Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

Distinguished guests, presenters, representatives, delegates, ladies and gentlemen, it is an absolute pleasure to welcome you to the 9th NCC Biennial Bushfire Conference. We are honoured by the broad representation, not only of speakers, but also of participants: representatives of government agencies, local government, community organisations, academics and key stakeholders and partners in our work, such as the NSW Farmers Association, the Forestry Corporation and many others. Welcome, and thank you for joining us here over the next two days.

As any of you who have taken a look at the agenda for the next two days will know, it is a diverse program. This program will be greatly enriched by your participation. In the room today, we have a very diverse range of knowledge and experience including: scientific, operational, expertise in community engagement and in many other areas. I am optimistic that over the

next couple of days, we will really see a coming together of a range of perspectives centred on the themes of this conference.

This broad representation, and the collaborative nature of the conversation, is a testament to the dedication and vision of those who founded NCC's engagement in the area of fire and biodiversity. For more than three decades, the NCC has taken an active role in ecologically sustainable fire management in New South Wales. Over that time, we have built strong partnerships and relationships, and many of those are with people here in the room today. As well as our dedicated team of staff, we have also benefited over the years, from an extraordinary amount of voluntary effort. This is perhaps one of the common themes, between the Commissioner's presentation and ours.

So much of the work the NCC does is driven and supported by volunteers, amongst them are our hundred plus member groups, and our Bush Fire Management Committee representatives. For those members and representatives who have made it here today, thank you. Not only for joining us here today but also, for the generous gift of your time and talents over the years.

Our fire and biodiversity programs are at their heart, fundamentally collaborative. Through partnerships and collaboration, NCC delivers fire and biodiversity programs

which aim to restore appropriate fire management into the landscape, to maintain, enhance or reinstate biodiversity and cultural values as well as landscape resilience.

Our approach is to focus our work in areas of high conservation and cultural values and in areas of high fire risk. In those areas, we implement strategies to increase community and ecological resilience, by integrating peer-reviewed science, the best operational knowledge, existing planning tools, local land management knowledge and the range of community values into a landscape framework.

Our community engagement approach is providing opportunities to create new benchmarks in sustainable fire management, driving research, as well as informing policy to ultimately achieve greater resilience for ecosystems and communities in the face of a changing climate.

These community engagement and education services include our Bushfire Program, the Hotspots Fire Project and the Firesticks Project. You will be hearing more about these programs over the next two days. NCC has also been instrumental in initiating the Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium, which again demonstrates our collaborative approach to fire management.

Our Bushfire Program has been active in fire management, education, advocacy and policy development for more than three decades. The program promotes ecologically sound fire management policies and planning, through our statutory roles in fire management committees

across NSW including the Rural Fire Service Advisory Council, Bush Fire Coordinating Committee and by supporting NCC representatives on Bush Fire Management Committees, as well as writing submissions, and participating on panels.

The Bushfire Program was established in 1979, and it aims to ensure that bushfire management activity is ecologically sustainable, whilst protecting life and property. The program also disseminates peer-reviewed science and encourages knowledge exchange between fire and land management agencies, scientists, conservationists and community members. It has held eight biennial bushfire conferences, with this one being the ninth. It has also held more than 72 issue based workshops and forums, including our new 'Preparing for Fire' community workshops.

Our 'Preparing for Fire' workshop series provide an interactive half-day workshop program for peri-urban communities who are living in areas of high conservation values and high bushfire risk. The workshops are designed to introduce the importance of shared responsibility, covering topics such as fire behaviour, Bush Fire Survival Plans, house and property preparation, and fire ecology. This work is really a manifestation of the themes of this conference, which is 'building resilient communities, in a resilient landscape'.

This conference is the 9th in its series, and it builds on a rich body of work. Many of you would have been in attendance at previous conferences. The conference for which we are gathered here today will explore the role that holistic fire management can play in making our landscapes and communities more resilient in a changing climate.

The conference will investigate ways to build cohesive communities which are more connected to their local environment and are more likely to undertake a shared responsibility approach to bushfire management. We will be hearing more about the themes of the conference throughout the day.

I would like to take a moment to thank our sponsors who have made this conference possible. Our platinum sponsors, the NSW Rural Fire Service, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Travers Bushfire and Ecology. Thank you very much for your support. Holding events of this calibre would not be possible without your generous support.

I would like to close by thanking the whole team who have been leading the preparations for this conference. I encourage you to reflect on the rich diversity of the program that has been put together, and the broad representation here in the room. We are all looking forward to the two days ahead. Thank you

for joining us for the 9th Biennial NCC Bushfire Conference, I wish you all the best over the next two days. Thank you.

BIOGRAPHY

Pepe Clarke is Chief Executive Officer of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC). He is an environmental lawyer with a background in law, environmental science and community education. He previously played a key role in the establishment of a regional office for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and worked as a consultant to a range of international conservation groups, including WWF, Conservation International and the Wildlife Conservation Society. He was previously the Programs Director for the Environmental Defender's Office (EDO), and has worked as a lecturer and researcher for a number of universities. He has a passion for nature conservation and a strong commitment to working for a just and sustainable future.