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Hon Peter Foster MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office

Via email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Chair

Petition No. 82 – Recommendation Five of the Independent Review into the 2021 Wooroloo Fire

I wish to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on this issue.

In the wake of the Wooroloo bushfire of February 2021 which covered 10,750 ha, destroyed 86 dwellings and caused an estimated insurance loss of \$93m, the state government asked the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Limited (AFAC) to conduct an independent review of operations leading up to and during the bushfire. The expert review team handed down its report *A review of the management of the Wooroloo fire of February 2021* (the Report) in March 2022 with 13 crucial recommendations for ensuring the necessary lessons are learned from the large-scale devastation that occurred.

Recommendation five, as stated by the petition, is crucial to the protection of life and homes. Homes that are built now must be able to withstand not only the extreme bushfire seasons that we have seen over recent years right across Australia but also the increasingly dangerous fire conditions of coming decades. The issue at the core of this recommendation is the need for a thorough assessment of “...any future developments to ensure that all necessary plans and provisions adequately consider community safety. It is also critical that the FES Commissioner advice is adopted wherever possible. This advice reflects the highest level of expertise in bushfire risk assessment.”¹

However, that expert recommendation was merely ‘noted’ by state government. The [March 2023 public update on government response to the review](#) makes clear that rather than ensuring FES Commissioner advice is adopted whenever possible and requiring any future developments to be adequately assessed for community safety, the government is instead just reviewing DFES land use planning policies, tools and templates. This fails to address the clear terms of recommendation five, which specify that any determination made by the FES Commissioner in respect to construction standards or subdivision developments be upheld by the consent authority. The Report makes no suggestion that the issue is one of a lack of understanding as to the existing roles and responsibilities of the FES Commissioner and other authorities in undertaking assessments and approvals, but rather that the existing roles and responsibilities fail to ensure that advice given by the FES Commissioner is adopted wherever possible.

By choosing not to meaningfully implement recommendation five, the government is knowingly enabling developments and subdivisions to occur which do not heed the FES Commissioners advice and therefore pose

¹ AFAC Independent Operational Review Team. (2022). *A review of the management of the Wooroloo fire of February 2021*, pp. 17-18. <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2022-09/Wooroloo-Bushfire-Review-2021.pdf>

a risk to community safety – a risk that will only grow over time. Efforts by Satterley to develop new residential estates in the bushfire prone areas adjacent to Wooroloo serve as undeniable evidence that WA’s planning system has failed to learn the critical lessons of the Report and implement recommendation five.

The case for the necessity of implementing recommendation five was succinctly put by the former inaugural DFES Commissioner and Assistant Police Commissioner Dr Wayne Gregson [during his speech](#) at the [Save Perth Hills](#) rally held 5 February 2023:

“Bushfires of the scale of Wooroloo require not only the rebuilding of houses but the rebuilding of lives, and these bushfires are becoming increasingly common as our climate changes along with the fires that we face. The evidence is clear and has been for many years notwithstanding it’s not acknowledged by those in power - climate change is intensifying bushfire conditions.

...We as a community learned many, many lessons from Wooroloo and every bushfire offers lessons for us to learn. This is not a cliché. It is an absolute truth that we as a community must heed those lessons.

...The human fallout of bushfire - trauma, personal, financial and lasting mental health effects need to be a priority when considering to further populate our bushfire regions with thousands more people and thousands more houses. As we move forward with any proposed development, we must heed the lessons of the past and we must act to truly protect people. We need to ensure that we never place thousands more people knowingly in harm’s way.”

Thank you for considering this petition.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BP Pettitt', with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the letters.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt MLC
Member for South Metropolitan