

Community Fact Sheet – Post Bushfire Vegetation Management on Bendalong Rd, Manyana

6 April 2021

Endeavour Energy met with Manyana Matters in February to discuss concerns about the post bushfire vegetation management we are conducting in the Shoalhaven. We understand that the recovery from the 2019/20 summer bushfires has been lengthy and traumatic for many who are trying to re-build their lives and their communities, and that the post bushfire vegetation management is a visible and painful reminder to many people. We committed to providing the community information regarding the program of works around Manyana (especially on Bendalong Rd). We hope the advice below is useful to you.

Why are we still undertaking bushfire vegetation management?

All three of the state's megafires (Currowan, Green Wattle Creek and Gospers Mountain) occurred within Endeavour Energy's network area, and it has taken Endeavour Energy more than 12 months to undertake management of the dead and dying vegetation surrounding our powerlines, with consent from private landowners, local councils and the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS). We are at the tail end of our post bushfire vegetation management program, and these last packages of work include communities in the Shoalhaven such as Manyana.

How much vegetation management has been required?

All three of the state's megafires (Currowan, Green Wattle Creek and Gospers Mountain) occurred within Endeavour Energy's network area, burning through more than 10,800 square kilometres and destroying an estimated 168 million trees.

About 170,000 trees left standing in close proximity to the electricity network, from the Hawkesbury to Ulladulla, were rendered "hazardous" by the megafires. These are the trees that we have either been pruning or removing, depending on an assessment by qualified arborists as to the risk they present. To put that into perspective, in an ordinary year Endeavour Energy would only remove about 1,000 "hazard trees" from the roughly 13 million trees in close proximity to our network.

What risk do these trees present?

Unfortunately, the 170,000 trees identified by Endeavour Energy present a real risk to community safety and reliability. They pose a significant risk of falling onto powerlines, endangering lives and livelihoods, and interrupting supply. Unstable trees falling on powerlines can also start fires, which is risk that weighs heavily on our concern.

Further, epicormic growth (the green fluffy growth seen on badly fire affected trees) also presents a risk, as it is weakly attached to the trunks and can fly off into powerlines, creating further risk of fire. We appreciate that trees with green epicormic growth, which may appear vital from a distance, may not in fact be healthy or structurally sound, and we are guided by expert advice from qualified arborists in this regard.

Typically, "hazard trees" created by the fires are trees that have lost their canopies and demonstrate mostly epicormic growth (fine, lightly attached sprouts on their trunks). Trees with healthy canopies are not generally considered fire-related hazard trees.

Safety is our legal and moral obligation

Our core objective is community safety, and this includes the immediate safety of residents, road users, pedestrians and our people working in the field. It also includes reliability and continuity of supply. The post bushfire management program is driven only by safety and reliability considerations. We undertake this work to fulfil our legal and moral obligations to keep our communities safe and to keep you connected to power.

The fact that these unstable trees must be removed both to protect public safety and to ensure power supply to dozens of communities is a regrettable but unavoidable consequence of the megafires.

What work are we doing around Manyana?

Endeavour Energy will be pruning and removing trees along Bendalong Rd, where ferociously hot fires burned through the Conjola National Park. We have worked closely with NPWS to obtain consent to undertake these works, which permit Endeavour Energy to prune or remove “trees heavily fire affected along this section of the road/powerline corridor”. Fire-affected trees are defined in the NPWS consent as:

“Visually defective vegetation (which is vegetation that is dead, dying and appears structurally unsound as identified from the perspective of the Network Asset as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so), that is outside the Minimum Clearing Requirement distances from Network Assets and which may require pruning, cutting or removal to obviate the risk of it falling, dropping and contacting the assets”.

Unfortunately, in some sections of Bendalong Rd this will include trees on both sides of the road. However, in other sections of Bendalong Rd, little or no vegetation management will be required, because the trees have recovered, showing visible and healthy canopies.

The NPWS consent also stipulates that: *“Trees with canopy vegetation, no epicormic growth within in the canopy and no visible defects are not to be removed.”* This is consistent with Endeavour’s understanding and earlier public statements about what constitutes a fire-affected tree.



Figure 1: Hazardous trees on Bendalong Rd

Importantly, the approval received from NPWS does not set any clearing distances from powerlines along Bendalong Rd, and while we understand why the community might think about clearing in terms of distances, this is not really the right way to look at how we must manage the risk of fire-damaged trees.

Greening Australia Initiative

Endeavour Energy has agreed to fund a *Greening Australia* tree planting program in Manyana and Lake Conjola, to act as an offset to the vegetation management necessitated by the fires. We look forward to *Greening Australia* working with interested residents and Shoalhaven City Council in the development of this planting program. We look forward to the growth and renewal that this program will help bring to your community.