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LIVING TURF PROVIDES BUSHFIRE PROTECTION SCIENTIFIC REPORT FINDS

Bushfires in Australia are common. The Black Summer fires of 2019/2020 are fresh in our minds and their devastating effects are still being felt. Hort Innovation recently completed research on the benefits of living turf and the protection it can provide from bushfires.

The project - *Conveying the benefits of living turf – a bushfire retardant* - delivered valuable information for the turf industry to promote the use of living turf as a bushfire retardant and to support activities in bushfire planning and preparation.

Hort Innovation's Head of Research and Development Byron De Kock said, "This research is very timely following on from Australia's fires this summer. Knowing that living turf can be used effectively to help defend Australian homes from fire and having this proven by science is paramount as we look to the next fire season."

Turf Australia's Jenny Zadro said, "Put simply, this is one of the most important pieces of research that the turf industry has invested in. To uncover the scientific proof that our product can help protect homes is game changing."

The research included a [literature review](#) into the benefits and maintenance requirements needed to maximise the capacity of living turf to reduce fire spread. The review combined existing information about Australia's living turf industries with the principles of landscaping for bushfire protection and technical knowledge of firefighting practices.

The project team also performed tests to assess the bushfire protection benefits of buffalo, kikuyu and couch. Grass samples were tested using attempted ignitions of the turf types at varying fuel moisture levels and at various lengths.

The research found that these turf varieties are highly resistant to ignition from fire, cementing the important role that turf can play in halting the spread of bushfires in peri-urban environments.

Paul de Mar, from research company, GHD said "The research tells us that watered and mowed lawns are not combustible under any conditions associated with bushfires unless they are completely dead and have extremely low moisture contents".

"Watered and mowed lawns provide a healthy and clean environment which can make an important contribution to creating a defensible space around homes and infrastructure in bushfire prone areas."

This research backs up what fire agencies have known internally for some time, that live turf is known operationally to both mitigate fire spread and is a favoured means of providing defensible space near houses, to allow safe defence of properties.

Lawns are a form of firebreak, which interrupt the path of surface fire spread – they can't stop airborne embers but they can provide defensible space from where such embers can be safely put out.

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