



Speech by

Mr S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Hansard 24 August 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Bushfire Season

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.07 a.m.), by leave: Queensland is tinderbox dry at the moment and is facing one of the worst bushfire seasons in years. The State's first local fire bans were imposed on Monday as a result of a long dry period, plus predictions from the Bureau of Meteorology that next week could bring strong gusty westerly winds. Shires affected at this stage are Beaudesert, Boonah, Esk, Ipswich, Gatton and Laidley. It is expected that the bans will run only until Sunday. The Rural Fire Service is hoping that further bans will not be required and is urging property owners around the State to consider local burn-offs at the appropriate time to reduce the level of fuel in their areas.

Data collected by the Queensland Rural Fire Service shows that more than 90% of Queensland received fewer than 10 millimetres of rain during July. That is about the same amount of water produced by a couple of ice cubes. Many areas of southern and western Queensland have had no rain at all during August. Extensive frosts have also meant that a great deal of grass on both sides of the range has been destroyed and is now ripe to burn. Likewise, satellite and on-the-ground information has shown that there are large areas of fuel growth and that the curing rate is very high in large areas of the State, particularly in a band through the State's south-west into the south-east.

While the situation looks serious, our Rural Fire Service volunteers are better equipped and better prepared than ever before to deal with bushfires. Queensland has more than 45,000 rural fire volunteers, who make up the State's 1,600 rural fire brigades. They are well trained, highly dedicated volunteers who will do everything they can to protect and assist their local communities.

Labor Governments in this State have a long history of supporting our volunteer firefighters. Queensland's last major bushfire season occurred in 1994. Successive Labor Governments have provided our rural fire brigades with record numbers of new rural fire vehicles. The rural fire levy scheme has enabled brigades to have more resources at their fingertips, while training and protective clothing and equipment provided to brigades is much better than previously delivered. In the past two years alone, the Beattie Government has delivered around 220 specially designed rural fire trucks to brigades across Queensland. Many of them were built under the \$7.5m Accelerated Vehicle Replacement Program designed to significantly reduce the age of the Rural Fire Service fleet.

Last month I had the pleasure of handing over 10 of these new vehicles to brigades in the Ipswich district. A number of those vehicles are now being used to help combat the dozens of fires currently burning throughout south-east Queensland. While our rural volunteer firefighters are equipped and prepared for the difficult job at hand, I would urge all Queenslanders to assist their local brigades wherever possible during this fire season. Individual property owners need to remember that the onus is on them to prepare themselves for the weeks and months ahead. Our rural fire brigades are ready and more than capable of dealing with the bushfire season that is almost upon us and will be working hard to minimise the risk of fire to life and property.
