



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

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FIREFIGHTER ASSISTANCE

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.49 p.m.): In rising to support the amendment moved by the minister, let me say firstly that in the electorate of Fitzroy, which covers some 44,000 square kilometres, I have 39 rural bush fire brigades. I know very well the commitment of those rural fire brigade members. I know how much of their time they give, at times putting at risk their own lives to protect the community and the property of those in their districts. They go out and they work very, very hard to make sure that the people in their area, if they can possibly get away with it, do not have to suffer the heartbreak that bushfires can bring.

I have a very close working relationship with many of the rural brigades. I can say confidently in this place that rural fire brigade members acknowledge and appreciate the commitment of Labor governments over the past 12 years in upgrading the firefighting fleet and the provision of safety equipment. Under Labor governments, Queensland's rural bush fire brigades have become efficient, effective fighting units. This is a big improvement on the demoralised underfunded firefighting units that were allowed to flounder under the National Party.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr PEARCE: The member should not sit opposite yapping away trying to tell us that we are not committed to looking after rural fire brigades in this state, because we are and we are very, very proud of what we have done.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! The member for Darling Downs!

Mr PEARCE: I am glad to see that they are all awake. Following the disastrous fires in New South Wales in early 1994, an audit was commissioned of operational preparedness in the event of widespread bushfire activity in Queensland. A recommendation from that audit was for the setting up of an interdepartmental committee to coordinate fire management and responses across government. A committee, currently under the chairmanship of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service assistant commissioner of rural operations and with representation from the major government land management agencies as well as the Brisbane City Council and the Bureau of Meteorology, meets on a regular basis.

The role of the committee is to provide a forum for the coordination of policy and procedures relating to rural fire management in order to achieve a consistent, comprehensive and whole-of-government approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities. The committee has brought about a high degree of commonality and compatibility across the agencies in the area of training, equipment, incident management and communications. As a result of this high level of cooperation, a joint incident control room has been established at the Beerburrum Forest Station and joint exercises involving the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the Department of Primary Industries, Forestry and National Parks personnel were conducted at a number of centres, including Yarraman and Maryborough prior to the fire season.

The use of the Australian interagency incident management system/incident control system ensures that there is uniformity of command and control at multiagency incidents, thus enhancing operational effectiveness and, more importantly, the safety of firefighters. This is about everybody working together and understanding where they are going.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is not only involved in fire suppression and hazard reduction during the cooler months, it is also committed to bushfire safety, education and keeping the community informed about fire activities and potential threat. Before I go on, can I just say one thing: unfortunately, government agencies and firefighting services can do only so much. Everybody who represents rural electorates knows this. The public and those in the line of fire must accept that they have a responsibility to be proactive in preparing themselves and their property for a fire that could erupt without warning. We all know how that happens. Those members who come from the land would know how fast a fire can get going and how fast it can move. Every individual has a responsibility to make sure that they prepare themselves and their property for fire just as those government agencies that have a responsibility to look after land must do whatever they can. This is about everybody working together to ensure that the best precautions are put in place. Even then under severe circumstances where we have out-of-control fires, the best prepared situations can still erupt into a situation where people can lose property and lives.

This year, firefighters have been particularly concerned about people living in semirural and urban fringe areas. Already a number of fires have threatened communities around Queensland. The most recent example has been the tragic loss of life and property experienced by the residents of the semirural townships of Ballandean and Glen Alpine in the south-west of the state.
