



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 21 August 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Fire Management

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (10.11 a.m.): Every winter my department conducts back-burning exercises to reduce the fuel available for summer wildfires. Traditionally, the amount of back-burning done has been limited by what my department could control. That meant that in a hot, dry winter fewer burn-offs were done by my department because the risk was too high. It occurred to me some time ago that there was a category of burns that would not be safe to do if my department operated alone but which would be safe with carefully coordinated cooperation with our emergency services. This category includes bushland adjacent to suburbs—that is, areas where arguably human safety requires it most.

The Minister for Emergency Services and I discussed this at length. We each directed our departments to work up a process for greater cooperative fire mitigation. I would like to thank the Minister for Emergency Services for how his initiative has borne fruit, even during his illness.

Recently, we undertook an exercise in the Brisbane Forest Park near Ferny Grove, Samford and The Gap. The exercise involved the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Department of Primary Industries—and I thank the Minister for Primary Industries—the Brisbane City Council, the Pine Rivers Shire Council, the Logan City Council, the Queensland Police Service—again, I thank the minister—State Emergency Services, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Rural Fire Service. The objective of the exercise was to enhance cooperative fire management arrangements. As part of the exercise the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service simulated an emergency situation so the different organisations could work together to finetune emergency response procedures in the case of an actual event.

Over 100 firefighters and support staff participated in the exercise. Participants were rostered both day and night to practise the critical timing and management required during the change of shifts. The incident management team was located at the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service at The Gap. Officers from each of the participating agencies were allocated senior roles within the team which allowed for interagency coordination at both senior management and operational levels.

The exercise highlighted the importance of being well prepared for the coming fire season. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service policy places the highest priority on the protection of human life in managing fire on its lands, followed by the protection of infrastructure and environmental values. Fire is an unfortunate but integral part of the Australian landscape. It can affect whole communities. Nothing we can do can guarantee that we can avoid tragic events like those that took place in New South Wales last year. But we can be more or less prepared. This recent exercise indicates a greater level of preparedness than ever before in Queensland. The exercise was a great cooperative effort by all those firefighters and people from a wide range of areas. I thank them for their input and commend them on their very real contributions to help protect lives, property and the environment.