



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 29 October 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Bushfires

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (10.03 a.m.): This year we have a high fire danger season. Some of the recent rain has helped to ease weather conditions. The state government has initiated a number of proactive measures in preparation for the forthcoming fire season. Over winter approximately 800 kilometres of high priority firebreaks were upgraded on and adjacent to parks and forests. These comprise over 30 individual projects, spreading from Cape York to the near urban outskirts of Brisbane. Some 750,000 hectares of service lands are planned for controlled burns during 2003-04. We are on track and we are on schedule, and will remain so, weather conditions permitting.

To date, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff have responded to some 63 wildfires on and adjoining its estate, affecting about 60,000 hectares of protected area and forest lands. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service planned burns occurred primarily along the populated coastal strip and included Queensland border ranges, the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast hinterlands, Brisbane Forest Park, the Rockhampton and Townsville areas, Cairns coastal hillsides and coastal islands. The Parks and Wildlife Service works closely with community members, traditional owners, owners of adjacent properties and with other management agencies such as the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

The level of cooperation between my department and that of the Minister for Emergency Services is unprecedented. He and I worked out that by working together we would be able to proactively burn areas closer to human settlement than it would be safe for my rangers to do without assistance and consequently we have been able to remove some fire threats that would otherwise have existed over this forthcoming summer. As a result, joint exercises were recently carried out at Brisbane Forest Park, Samford and The Gap to enhance cooperative fire arrangements. Over 100 firefighters and support staff participated in the exercise. An independent review of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service operational fire management procedures by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has been completed and the recommendations are being implemented. Comprehensive fire strategies are also being prepared for areas where management issues have been identified, such as Bribie Island.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan: Hear, hear!

Mr WELLS: I thank the honourable member for Pumicestone, whose representations provided valuable information. This management plan has recently been released for public comment. The final strategy will be the basis for all fire management activities on 12,500 hectares of land on Bribie Island, including national park, proposed national park, pine plantation, council reserves and some freehold land. Bushfires are a natural part of the Australian landscape and nobody can completely prevent them, but we can take the necessary steps available to be well prepared. Over the winter season this government has done more proactive wildfire prevention work than ever before.