



Speech by

# Hon. Neil Roberts

MEMBER FOR NUDGEE

Hansard Tuesday, 18 August 2009

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## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

**Hon. NS ROBERTS** (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (10.33 am): In February Victoria suffered some of the worst bushfires in its history. Some 173 people lost their lives in the Black Saturday fires, with hundreds of millions of dollars of damage to property and infrastructure. Six months on, the royal commission established by the Victorian government to examine all aspects of the disaster has released its interim report with 51 recommendations.

While vegetation and weather patterns are different in Queensland, we can ill afford to ignore the commission, its findings and recommendations. Major themes of the report concern information sharing and community education, identifying bushfire risk, communicating warnings and the use of the standard emergency warning signals and the prepare, stay and defend or leave early policy. Of particular interest are the commission's comments in relation to the stay or leave early policy and its recommendation that the policy be strengthened to highlight the risks of staying and defending and promoting leaving early as the safest option.

The stay or leave early policy was introduced by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in partnership with the Queensland Police Service in April 2007. The policy supports the Australasian Fire Authorities Council stance that householders should be able to remain within their properties and defend them should a fire threat occur provided certain conditions are met. I have asked the Department of Community Safety to provide me with specific advice on both the policy and communication implications of the recommendations regarding the stay or leave early policy.

It is important to highlight though that, although the commission suggests a shift in the policy's emphasis, the message of preparedness needs to remain and be strengthened. I can advise that a number of the recommendations made in the interim report are already in place in Queensland or their implementation is already underway. The standard emergency warning signal can already be used to draw attention to broadcast warnings about life-threatening fires and additionally bushfire warning sirens are being trialled on Mount Nebo. Queensland is working with other states and territories to implement a telephone based automatic warning system. This report will require careful consideration and analysis. My department is already reviewing its content and, in particular, assessing the relevance of the recommendations to Queensland.