




Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Thursday, 27 October 2011

FRASER ISLAND, FIRE

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (4.53 pm): Earlier this month, a number of unsuspecting tourists on Fraser Island almost paid the ultimate price for the Bligh Labor government's disastrous record on national park management when a so-called controlled burn got completely out of control. In the words of one appalled and irate tourist—

On Sunday we went for a drive—
from Kingfisher Bay—

to Lake McKenzie and Central Station ... we left due to the smoke in the area ... and on returning to the resort we were hit by a wall of flames in front and from behind ... with no option I was able to drive through the fire for about 300 metres to get to clear ground.

After surviving the fire, the group continued to meet other Kingfisher Bay visitors obliviously venturing towards the fire front. They also met rangers and were told, 'It's okay. It's a controlled burn.' That response was repeated by resort staff, but that was clearly not the case. At 7 pm Kingfisher Bay Resort was placed under lockdown with the fire front approaching, and the battle continued into the evening to bring the fire back under control. The tourist has nothing but praise for the QFRS and the Rural Fire Service, but he has condemnation for those responsible for initiating and monitoring the fire. Again, in his words—

This situation should NEVER have happened, where a fire was set by QPWS ... around a holiday period, a time with the most ... visitors on the Island.

That fire was not managed properly, roads were not closed and no information was given to the tourists at Kingfisher Bay. Aside from the narrow escape from this disaster, the uncontrolled fire will have far-reaching ramifications. A number of guests of the resort vow never to return to Fraser Island because of their experience. But perhaps that is what this government wanted all along: yet another attempt to lock up our protected estates and throw away the key.

Everyone accepts that fire plays an important part in the management of the natural environment in Queensland and that it ensures a level of safety for residents and tourists alike. The right kind of fire actually has nature conservation benefits and has long been used by Aboriginal people for such purposes, but there are some core principles that should apply especially in the case of high-traffic sites like Fraser Island. Controlled burns should occur during the cooler months of May, June and July. They should occur outside of the school holiday period. As the member for Hervey Bay said, 'I'm amazed the government has decided to burn off on the island when fire bans are normally in place.'

In conclusion, the visitor I quoted earlier has written to the minister demanding answers—who is responsible, what disciplinary action will be taken, how are the QPWS processes going to be improved—so that this near disaster never happens again. Given his experience, Minister, the least he deserves is a response.