




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Rural Fire Brigades

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.35 pm): As shadow minister for fire, emergency services and volunteers, it is my pleasure and a privilege to join in the Yellow Ribbon Day celebrations to honour Queensland's more than 36,000 rural fire brigade volunteers. Our rural fireys play an invaluable role in protecting and serving Queensland's rural and regional communities, such as Blackall, Longreach, Boulia, Emerald and Blackwater, which I represent in the vast outback electorate of Gregory. With more than 1.7 million square kilometres to manage right across Queensland, through their commitment and professionalism, our rural fireys keep us safe. Our rural fire brigade volunteers are out there fighting the good fight and focused on protecting rural Queensland, which represents 93 per cent of the state's land area. That is a big job in anyone's language and they deserve all the support we can provide them.

Yet while Queenslanders are preparing their homes and businesses in case of fire, the Labor government has failed to take the necessary steps to protect Queenslanders from bushfires. The Labor government has shown that, while it is happy to don the yellow ribbons to support our rural fireys, when it comes to keeping Queensland safe, it is not willing to implement the policies that support them. This government's failure to fully action and implement the Auditor-General's 2015 report and recommendations to keep Queenslanders safe from bushfires is putting Queensland communities at risk. Of the seven sensible recommendations, which were accepted fully by the government, not one has been fully implemented, putting Queenslanders' lives at risk—for more than three years.

Queenslanders know better than most that bushfires are terrifying and devastating events. We also know that bushfire impacts can be mitigated and managed through responsible and proactive planning, including back-burning. Put simply, it is easier to light a fire than it is to put one out. Why is the Labor government not taking basic precautions to protect us from bushfires, especially as we head into an even drier than normal season with an increased fire risk? The simple answer is the radical Greens and environmentalists within the Labor government are putting trees ahead of protecting human life. Under their influence, when it comes to preventing and mitigating bushfires in this state, the Labor Party is putting ideology before human life. Any rural firey will tell us that it is much easier and safer to fight a fire in an area that has been back-burned.

How can this government expect our rural fireys to do their job when it has failed to take the necessary steps to mitigate against bushfires? How can this Labor government stand by the fact that 47 per cent of this state is without an evacuation plan? How can this Labor government stand by the fact that 37 per cent of Queenslanders are unaware of the fire warning scheme and that schoolchildren in high-risk areas are not being provided with the appropriate support to prepare for bushfires? How can the minister not be concerned about his department putting Queenslanders at risk?

In 2015, the former LNP government committed to implementing the Auditor-General's recommendations, but here we are in 2018 and we are yet to see any of the recommendations fully implemented. I do not understand why the Labor government has not taken the basic and necessary safety precautions to ensure the safety of Queenslanders. It is extremely concerning that the Labor government has not taken those precautions.

Queenslanders have been quite rightly outraged at the Labor government for dropping the ball when it comes to ensuring their safety from bushfires. Despite this government's failure to get real and serious about delivering bushfire safety for Queensland, our rural fireys continue to put in the hard yards and quite rightly should be celebrated on Yellow Ribbon Day. The courage, the selflessness, the skills and the local knowledge that these volunteers bring to the difficult and often dangerous work they undertake deserves the admiration of every Queenslander. I believe each and every volunteer firey deserves to be honoured and I am pleased to see Yellow Ribbon Day providing that public recognition. I grew up seeing my father in the rural fire brigade and I think I understand how vital these volunteers are. They are the backbone of these communities. It is the very fact that they are local volunteers that allows them to be agile and responsive to local needs.

Our rural fire brigades are not just about fighting bushfires. In my electorate the Bluff Rural Fire Brigade not only serves a large area of rural land but also takes on partial urban responsibilities. There are brigades such as Blackwater, whose dedicated members are often our first responders when it comes to accidents on our major highway knowing they may possibly face dangerous chemicals and fuel spills, fire and even human fatality. There are brigades such as the Anakie Rural Fire Brigade, which has the unique challenge of combining traditional bush brigade responsibilities with keeping the residents in the gemfields safe. I make special mention of the network of 2,600 rural fire wardens who bring to the Queensland's service extensive local knowledge and take on added responsibility.