




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Inquiry

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.34 pm): There is very little about Wednesday, 28 November that makes me smile. My electorate of Rockhampton takes in the town of Gracemere. We knew there was a bad fire in Stanwell, just west of Rocky and Gracemere. It was hot and gusty and I could smell it as well. Then I could see it. At lunchtime there was a glow on the horizon. There was a glow in the middle of the day. It was coming our way—towards Gracemere. The smoke, the heat, the wind—I have never heard or felt anything like it and I never want to again.

I listened to the updates coming from the Queensland Disaster Management Committee. It was quickly becoming evident that the risk to life was real. By this time this part of my electorate had been declared catastrophic. This is the highest rating for a bushfire. A catastrophic bushfire can be extreme, erratic, fast moving and cannot be contained or controlled. A catastrophic categorisation—the highest and most critical of the six fire danger ratings in Queensland—means: the fire may be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving; the flames will be higher than rooftops; there is a potential for many people to be injured and homes and businesses to be destroyed; well-prepared and well-constructed homes will not be safe; and leaving is the only option for survival.

Then we have the LNP misleading the community by saying that fires are being caused by the change in vegetation management legislation. I have fought fires as a young fella and I have fought alongside my brother to save his property outside of Gympie. I know what a fire can do and what fire is capable of, but I have never witnessed what I saw on Wednesday, 28 November last year.

For the LNP to say it is poor management makes me really angry. Poor management does not factor into the state-of-the-art technology used to predict where this fire was going. Poor management does not factor into the development of the Phoenix bushfire simulation program. Poor management does not factor into the QFES development predictive software known as Sabre. That was foresight. That was progressive. That was brilliant management.

At 3 pm on that day residents in Kabra, Gracemere and the surrounding areas were told to leave immediately—to leave their homes and their properties and head to family and friends in Rockhampton. An evacuation centre had been established at the Rocky showgrounds for those who needed somewhere to stay. Nearly 11½ thousand people evacuated their homes and businesses. Hand on my heart, that is 11½ thousand people in my community whose lives were saved.

Our community of Gracemere is tough; it is resilient. I am incredibly proud to be their local member. I cannot thank the QFES staff and volunteers enough for their help, their dedication and their support. Funnily enough, that does make me smile.