




Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 17 September 2019

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Bushfires

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Fire and Emergency Services) (9.50 am): I rise to support the Premier and Deputy Premier's statements to the House and to commend them both on the way they reached out to and worked directly with Queenslanders in this most trying of times. Recently, I joined the Deputy Premier to visit Canungra and saw firsthand not just the devastation but the sheer determination of Queenslanders to stand strong when the worst of Mother Nature hits us. What we have seen since 5 September is a frightening, early start to the 2019 bushfire season—some of the worst bushfires in 130 years following last year's unprecedented events. As Minister for Fire and Emergency Services and on behalf of everyone in this House, I extend a great debt of gratitude to our Queensland fireys, emergency services personnel, police, volunteers and everyday Queenslanders. They all have been working nonstop to keep their communities safe.

I also join the Premier and Deputy Premier in acknowledging our cousins from New South Wales who came to help when our own crews needed time to rest in between battling what were at times some ferocious fire conditions. I acknowledge also the 170 crew from other states and from New Zealand who joined and of course the 120 crew who now are still currently on the fire ground. Having more than 1,400 active bushfires burn across the state in under two weeks is quite simply extraordinary. Queensland Fire and Emergency Services' response continues, with 26 appliances currently on scene and three aircraft tasked as of yesterday. There are currently 12 aircraft available for tasking, including bombing and mapping.

Mr SPEAKER: Sorry to interrupt you, Minister. Members, I have already asked members to keep their conversations to a minimum or to take them outside. There is too much general conversation in the chamber. It is time for ministerial statements.

Mr CRAWFORD: More than 25 emergency alert campaigns, including one advice, 10 watch and act and 14 emergency warnings, were issued over the period of this bushfire event. Today and until the end of this week, Queensland is set to experience in some parts of the state severe to high to very high fire conditions. Severe fire danger ratings are forecast to affect the Darling Downs and Granite Belt today and may affect isolated parts of the northern Maranoa and Warrego, southern Central Highlands and coalfields and western south-east coast districts. Current fire bans remain in place for much of the state including the Central Highlands region, the Fraser Coast, Gold Coast, Townsville, Hinchinbrook and Moreton Bay.

We know too well that with extreme weather events in this state it is not a matter of if but when. It is never too late for Queenslanders to prepare their household emergency plan for the unexpected. I strongly urge everyone to remain calm and prepared and to listen to their local radio for updates, monitor their mobile phone for alerts and warnings, and keep their mobile phone charged. Queenslanders are a resilient bunch and we plan for the unexpected, but we should brace ourselves for more to come. This

means a change in the way you do business in your community and in your backyard. From food and fresh water to first-aid kits and batteries, the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services website is a one-stop shop for information on what you will need to get ready to protect what is important to you.

Our QFES staff and volunteers without a second thought always roll up their sleeves through our state's darkest times. Queenslanders can be assured that, no matter what the weather throws at us, they can always rely on the dedication and professionalism of QFES staff and volunteers when we need it most. The Palaszczuk government remains committed to supporting the work of our emergency services now and into the future. That is why we have put record investment into fire stations, equipment and staff. Since 2015 this government has brought on board more than 330 new firefighters. As the Deputy Premier stated, we have 100 more firefighters being delivered by the end of next year.

We also boosted our fleet with 365 new appliances—222 trucks for the Rural Fire Service and 143 trucks for our fire and rescue service at a cost of nearly \$40 million. The budget this year allocates more than \$50 million for more fleet for fire and rescue and the Rural Fire Service. On top of that, there is \$35 million for capital works. We will always back our QFES men and women.

As always, we learn from every event so we can always be best prepared for the next. That is why, as part of good practice, as I did after last year's fires and floods, I reached out to Inspector-General Emergency Management and asked them to undertake a thorough review of this latest emergency response.

I put on record my thanks to Acting Commissioner Mike Wassing from QFES, who has done an outstanding job, along with the State Disaster Coordinator, Deputy Commissioner Steve Gollschewski—a fantastic pair who have done an exceptional job in leading this state through very trying times in a season which certainly still has another good two to three months yet to run. The Palaszczuk government has supported our wonderful emergency services people since 2015 and will always continue to back our emergency services and volunteers in the future.