



Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Parliamentary Inquiry

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Fire and Emergency Services) (5.06 pm): I rise to oppose the motion. It is a real shame that outrageous commentary by those opposite brings us here once more to fend off the politicisation of bushfires. At the height of the state of fire emergency declaration, our QFES staff and volunteers were battling more than 80 fires across this state. What did we get from the LNP members? Baseless accusations, misinformed headlines and the undermining of authorities. They do not understand that each time one of these ridiculous claims was made, it took QFES staff off operational duties. When their complete focus should have been on the emergency at hand, QFES staff were pulled away to debunk LNP attempts to scaremonger Queenslanders. It was frustrating, it was disappointing and it was disrespectful to our people.

I want to thank and acknowledge those opposition members who came to me, or to my office, to clarify and raise concerns rather than run a scare campaign in the media. That allowed QFES to fact check or take action for a swift resolution. I welcome all members of this House—government members or otherwise—to contact me or my office during operational events if they have concerns or issues rather than attempt to score political points. To those members, I say thank you.

Unlike those members opposite, I have nothing but gratitude and pride in our emergency services. Since September ground and aircrews have worked tirelessly to protect lives, businesses and vital infrastructure. I thank them for their selfless service to the people of Queensland.

I have been the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services for two years now. As a previous first responder, like many others in this House, I know nothing ever goes perfectly to plan and that we should always strive for better. That is why last month I requested the Inspector-General Emergency Management to undertake a thorough investigation into the state's emergency response to the September bushfires and the rest of the bushfire season. IGEM has consulted with relevant local, state and federal agencies and entities, the Queensland Police Service, QFES and, most importantly, bushfire affected communities such as Stanthorpe, Sarabah and Peregian Springs.

As the Palaszczuk government did after last year's fires and this year's floods, we want to hear where our preparation and response efforts were most effective and where improvement may be needed. This ensures that best practice is followed and areas where improvements can be made are identified. Future community consultation from IGEM will occur right up until the end of this season. IGEM will compile its seasonal review once the bushfire season is over. This review will be benchmarked against its own 2018 recommendations.

Despite all of that, here we are facing another call from the opposition leader for a parliamentary inquiry. In case the member for Nanango has forgotten, it was the one-term LNP government that established the IGEM role. To jog her memory, I refer the opposition leader to a media release of the then minister, now mayor, Jack Dempsey of December 2013 in which he said—

... the Inspector General role ... ensure ... emergency services work together efficiently and ensure all emergency responses meet high standards.

He further said that it—

... ensures all police, emergency services workers and volunteers will be able to spend more time on the frontline rather than battling bureaucracy.

I do not always agree with Jack, but Jack was right. By her own party's admission, my request for an IGEM review will ensure we meet high standards and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy. Yet here we are.

If we want to talk about bushfire mitigation the numbers do the talking. The Palaszczuk government has approved on average 27,463 hazard reduction permits each year since 2015. Our highest year was 28,655 permits—1,300 more than the LNP's highest. Opportunities for hazard reduction burning this year were severely limited by the smaller window to burn safely. It is landholders who ultimately decide when or whether to undertake a mitigation burn and there are many reasons they may not do so. This includes the ongoing drought in many areas and the need to preserve fodder and feed for stock.

Our government will always work closely with QFES and with IGEM to ensure our preparations and our responses are in line with best practice. In relation to the QAO report, that was a report on a fire that was 10 years ago in a different state. We have our own report; it is called the IGEM report.