



Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Parliamentary Inquiry



Mrs FRECKLINGTON (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.00 pm): I move—

1. That the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly by 31 March 2020 on the effectiveness of the Queensland government's bushfire prevention and preparedness activities leading to the 2019 Queensland fires.
2. In undertaking this inquiry, the committee should consider:
 - (a) analysis of fire reduction practices conducted and coordinated by QFES including its responsibility to issue notices to landowners to reduce fuel loads including state controlled land and national parks;
 - (b) the IGEM 2018 bushfire report's findings that overall bushfire prevention activities undertaken by QFES declined 83 per cent, completed hazard reduction burns declined 75 per cent, completed firebreaks declined 82 per cent and community education activities declined 88 per cent in 2018 compared to 2016;
 - (c) the impact that a \$13 million, or 25 per cent, cut in 2019-20 funding compared to the previous financial year had on the Rural Fire Service;
 - (d) Auditor General's report No. 5, *Follow-up of bushfire prevention and preparedness* finding that QFES still did not know if Queensland's fuel loads were being managed effectively;
 - (e) the appropriateness of funding provided by government to implement fire reduction practices on state owned land and national parks,
 - (f) the failure to implement any of the Auditor-General's recommendations in report No. 10, *Bushfire prevention and preparedness*; and
 - (g) whether juveniles being charged and convicted of arson and endangering property are being appropriately dealt with.

In a bushfire-prone state like ours, the government must stop at nothing to ensure that our communities are kept safe. Queensland should be as bushfire ready as it possibly can. That is why Queensland deserves a parliamentary inquiry into the ferocious fires that have threatened lives and properties. The next bushfire season may be even more destructive if lessons are not learned from what Queensland has gone through and may continue to go through this season. The current season still has a long way to go and homes, lives and animals are at stake across this great state of ours. We owe it to the general public and we owe it to our firefighters and our volunteers to ensure that the state's bushfire management practices are working the way they should.

After the recent brutal bushfires that swept across Queensland, the importance of a parliamentary inquiry cannot be played down. Last year, more than one million hectares were blackened in a fortnight of fires. I visited the devastated areas, including Baffle Creek, Bloomsbury and Agnes Water. At that time, those on this side of the House called for a parliamentary inquiry, but those opposite, on the Palaszczuk government side, were too weak and opposed it.

In September this year severe bushfires began to flare up again. Countless communities were put in harm's way, including on the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast hinterland, the Somerset area, the Darling Downs and the Southern Downs area. In Beechmont, I met Pamela Skeen, who lost her house.

She fled the fire with little more than her canaries and Stewart's bag of undies, which she keeps telling me about. At Stanthorpe Kim Vogel and I stood in the ashes of his home after a fire raced up a gully and destroyed his property. I want to give a shout-out and thanks to Megan Stiffler and her QFES team for the work of QFES and what they did to save that town. Those firefighters were absolute heroes.

There were also the heroes of the Queensland Police Service who dealt with the fires around Peregian. I want to give a shout-out to senior constables Cam McLean, Mark Johnston, Darryl Campbell and Gabby Zwaan-Ward from the Nambour road traffic branch who went through the embers to get people out of their homes, making sure that people were safe in those Peregian fires. Those are the people who this motion is for—so that we can protect the lives of our hardworking volunteers, our police, our firefighters, the lives of the mums and dads and also the livestock and the properties that are getting burnt to the ground because of unsafe fire management practices across this great state. A parliamentary inquiry would guarantee that this state's bushfire management policies are helping, not hindering them.

We know that those opposite voted against this motion last year. When we look at the facts, we see that Queenslanders need to know why those opposite have failed to implement the Auditor-General's bushfire recommendations from five years ago—five years ago! The Rural Fire Service deserves to know why those opposite in the Palaszczuk government have slashed their funding by \$13 million. In 2018, bushfire prevention activities by QFES plunged by 83 per cent compared to the number of bushfire prevention activities undertaken in 2016. Those opposite should be doing more to prevent bushfires, not cutting back on proven safety measures.

A parliamentary inquiry would get to the bottom of these issues and provide a path forward for the people of Queensland. If this government wants to be more open and transparent—and it is clear, through its actions, that it does not—it will listen to the stakeholders it is ignoring. Why do landholders in this great state of ours say that the state Palaszczuk government is the worst neighbour they can have when it comes to bushfires? That is not the reputation that I want a government of this state to have. The concerns of rural firefighters and communities in regional Queensland must be listened to. The LNP will continue to fight for the right of communities to feel safe. I call on this House to support a full, open and frank parliamentary inquiry.