




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Parliamentary Inquiry

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (5.44 pm): I rise to oppose the motion. One year ago the region around Mackay was on fire. Large bushfires are new to my region, and one thing that we found out was that rainforests do burn. I would like to recount a story from someone caught up in the bushfire.

Trapped in her car as a fireball rolled over the bonnet, Eungella resident Marilynne Wright heard the banging on her passenger seat window. Looking across, Mrs Wright saw a rural firefighter yelling one thing: 'Get out!' It was around midday on Tuesday, 27 November. A fire on Dalrymple Road was moving towards the Wrights' home. With only minutes to spare before the fire arrived, Mrs Wright said that she ran through the house to see what she could save. 'My husband said that it was all clutter, but to me it was memories. It was one of those moments—I realised there was nothing I could take. We grabbed some food and shoved it in the car. The fire was all around us—crawling through the grass. It was so hot things were spontaneously combusting around me. Even the dust in the air was exploding.'

Ian Wright, her husband, went first down the driveway, which was already bordered by flames. When she tried to follow, a fireball exploded over the bonnet of her car. 'I disappeared under the fireball,' Mrs Wright said. The rural firefighters helped her escape the flames and retreat to safety. The Wrights did not just get to safety; they rolled up their sleeves and supported all of the volunteers who were out there on the fire lines and provided food for them.

At Eungella and Finch Hatton 121,000 hectares were burnt from 16 November 2018 to 5 December 2018. There were 10 emergency alerts, 120 bushfire community warnings, two evacuations, three dwellings destroyed and four damaged, eight sheds destroyed and one damaged, and 21 dispatched using eight aircraft.

Today what we have heard from those opposite and from the Leader of the Opposition comes from a 2019 report from New South Wales. We need to follow up-to-date evidence and reports from Queensland. The response from those opposite is to want to fly politicians around the state looking at the damage. People on the ground do not want to see politicians who do not know about fires in their backyard. They want the experts to get on with the job.

It is clear that the members opposite do not understand the role that QFES plays in managing bushfire risk. Landholders decide when to undertake a mitigation burn. The role of QFES is to grant a fire permit and to assist landholders. There are many reasons they may not seek a bushfire permit. This includes ongoing drought and landholders preserving fodder and feed for stock.

The responsibility for managing fuel loads rests with the landholder. QFES actively encourages this responsibility through a range of activities such as leading area fire management groups, using the permit-to-burn systems, constructing firebreaks, grazing, slashing and mulching. Andrew Houley from the Rural Fire Service told me that his biggest problem is landholders who want to have bushland right up to their house. We are out there educating landholders so they know that they need to get out there and apply for their permits.

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs GILBERT: Members opposite who are calling out should have some respect for the landholders because some of them probably vote for them but maybe not after today. In my area we are assisting QFES and the rural fire brigade. After the fires we handed over keys to trucks for Eungella, Seaforth, Calen and Eton. Andrew Houley showed me areas where landholders needed to burn off. He found it very frustrating that they had not done so.

(Time expired)