




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Parliamentary Inquiry

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.49 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the opposition leader. The motion we are debating tonight is important. This motion is a heartfelt call for a public inquiry into bushfire preparedness across the state. It is about getting real answers for those Queenslanders who want us to have a public parliamentary inquiry and who have suffered the impacts now of not one, but two, unusual and frightening fire seasons. This is a genuine and reasonable request made on behalf of all Queenslanders. We deserve to know the truth.

All Queenslanders deserve to know why this Labor government has overseen an 83 per cent reduction in overall fire prevention activities. Those volunteers who are still battling fires in the Scenic Rim deserve to know why there was a 75 per cent reduction in completed hazard reduction burns. Those farmers who have had their crops destroyed at Byfield near Yeppoon—which I saw—deserve to know why there was an 82 per cent reduction in completed firebreaks. Those Queenslanders who lost their homes to bushfires in Ravensbourne deserve to know why there was an 88 per cent reduction in community education activities. Do not believe me: it is right there in the Labor government's own IGEM report into last year's bushfires. The Labor government's own Operation Cool Burn figures show alarming falls in bushfire prevention measures by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services in 2018 compared to 2016. While the Labor Party should be doing more to prepare for bushfires, instead they are cutting back on proven bushfire prevention measures. That is why we need a bipartisan public inquiry into these bushfires.

The LNP is not alone in calling for this bushfire inquiry. Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland, the group that represents those volunteers fighting on the front line against these devastating bushfires, has called for answers. At the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland general meeting on 28 September 2019, the volunteer group moved a motion calling for a full parliamentary inquiry into the bushfires. Those fighting the fires want answers, and the only thing between them and the truth is the Labor government.

Our fireys do an incredible job protecting the public and property, but they are being let down by a Labor government that is failing to ensure emergency services have the resources they need to do their job. Despite the report identifying the massive drop in measures, strangely IGEM failed to make any recommendations to address this shortfall. Why was this? Clearly, the IGEM report was politically sanitised to soften the blow on the Labor government, but they could not stop some truth slipping through the cracks. The same report shows that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, which is responsible for issuing notices to clear fuel loads, only issued 12 notices to landholders to reduce fuel loads on properties and state-controlled land or national parks.

To make matters worse, Queensland Audit Office report No. 5 of 2018-19, titled *Follow-up of bushfire prevention and preparedness*, found that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services does not know if Queensland's fuel loads are being managed effectively. This seems a crazy state of affairs

when you consider the role that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services plays in servicing Queenslanders. Clearly, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services is failing to discharge its duties in directing private and state government owners of land to properly manage their land and conduct fire reduction burns. In fact, the Auditor-General says that all five recommendations—fully agreed by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services from the 2014-15 report—were still incomplete and outstanding five years later.

It is completely unacceptable that for five years Labor has failed to act on improving preparedness and prevention activities that will save lives, communities and native vegetation and protect wildlife and livestock. It is completely unconscionable for Labor to have let down Queenslanders by failing in their responsibility to coordinate and manage bushfire mitigation. But the Labor government has not stopped there. It is now clear that Labor is making a massive cut to Rural Fire Service funding in Queensland. Rural Fire Service funding has been cut by \$13 million this financial year, which is a 25 per cent reduction from the 2018-19 budget. That means less money for fire trucks, materials and the training needed to protect Queensland lives and property. Why should those tasked with fighting bushfires in Queensland be given less at a time they desperately need more? We need to make sure we have a full parliamentary public inquiry into bushfires, and the Labor government should support this motion.