




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Parliamentary Inquiry

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (5.21 pm): I rise to support the call for a parliamentary committee inquiry into Queensland's bushfire preparedness. Queensland has seen an unprecedented number of fires in 2019. Those fires have burned statewide, from the Far North to the border of New South Wales. The ongoing drought and unfavourable weather conditions have not helped and neither has the lack of controlled burning in many areas. An enormous volume of grass and vegetation adds fuel to any fire that is started deliberately, accidentally or environmentally.

On 13 February 2019 I asked the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, Craig Crawford, a question on notice, which I am happy to table.

Tabled paper: Answer to Question on Notice No. 55, asked on 13 February 2019, in relation the fire mitigation plan for the Ravensbourne area [2159](#).

My question was about the fire mitigation plan for an area within the Condamine electorate. I asked—

Will the Minister outline the department's fire mitigation plan for the Ravensbourne area north east of Toowoomba given the current ongoing dry conditions and large volume of vegetation in close vicinity to residential areas?

In his response the minister advised—

The Darling Downs AFMG considers and assesses the bushfire risk in the Ravensbourne area. This group, which includes local stakeholders such as representatives from Council, Rural Fire Brigades (RFBs) and QPWS met on 6 March 2019 to discuss risks, solutions, and plan mitigation operations for Operation Cool Burn 2019.

He further advised, 'The risks and the associated mitigation activities will be documented in the 2019 Bushfire Risk Mitigation Plan, that is currently being compiled.'

On 12 November a fire started in the Pechey and Hampton areas near Ravensbourne, in exactly the area that concerned locals have raised with me. That fire is still burning today. It has destroyed almost 20,000 hectares of land and seven properties, as well as vehicles and equipment. People in Crows Nest were forced to flee their homes as the fire came dangerously close to the township and an aged-care facility had to be evacuated. The huge fire caused a power outage in Toowoomba's water supply and a dozen surrounding smaller communities. That was due to no easement being granted along the power corridor and thick regrowth growing unmanaged underneath the powerlines. Residents were restricted to domestic water use only, as the council worked to repair the damaged network.

At the end of the second week of November, there were 80 active fires in Queensland, 293 vehicles deployed throughout the state, and 100 interstate and international firefighting personnel sent to assist local firefighters already deployed in Queensland. Surely that is of great concern to the minister and his 2019 bushfire mitigation plan?

Last week I met with a group of residents from Hampton. They advised me that no controlled burning activity has taken place for a number of years in the area. Their homes are on the edge of the Hampton National Park, which is so overgrown with vegetation that the signage can no longer be seen. I have a photo that I took at three metres distance from the national park sign, which I am happy to table.

Tabled paper. Photograph of national park signage covered by foliage [2160](#).

Controlled burning activities across Queensland needed to have taken place in the winter months of 2019, but from my inquiries very little has taken place. For the past 19 months, weather forecasters have continually predicted little to no rainfall for most of Queensland, but there has been no action on controlled burning. The damage and losses are considerable in Condamine and across the state. The cost to individuals, communities, native animals and infrastructure has not yet been counted. It will be significant and it will take time for the recovery process to take place. Again I ask the minister: what was the 2019 bushfire mitigation plan for the Ravensbourne area?

I take this opportunity to thank all of the firefighters who volunteer their time, those locally based and those from interstate and overseas, and the police and SES services personnel. The fact that the fire is suspected of being deliberately lit is frustrating and disappointing. We can only hope that the culprit is arrested and charged. There are many questions around that fire. It needs a parliamentary committee inquiry to cover all aspects, both before and after the event.