




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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ADJOURNMENT

Mirani Electorate, Bushfires

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (7.22 pm): I rise to address the House and reflect on my personal experiences and observations of the recent bushfires and some of the early flooding which have seriously affected much of Central and North Queensland. At one point there were simultaneous fires stretching from north of Eungella and Dalrymple Heights all the way down to Alton Downs and beyond. That is something like 450 kilometres by road from one end to the other. I will say straight up that, with my assistant, I drove my four-wheel drive towing a trailer full of ice, drinks and food around virtually every active fire front for a full week, including overnight in many cases, during the height of the events.

In my seat of Mirani there were 117 fires and an extraordinary 271,000 hectares of land engulfed. Almost immediately after the fires a cyclone brought the first of the heavy rains. The service and efforts rendered by our rural fire brigade, the urban fire brigade, the QPS, the QAS and volunteers and the mountains of assistance and donations forthcoming from across the wider community was incredible.

Efforts were hamstrung by a lack of timely support from some state and local government agencies. Take for instance the fires at West Carmila. Much of it was burning on state land purchased for the unbuilt Upper Connors Dam. How ironic that the rural fire volunteers had to trek upwards of 40 or 50 kilometres out of the hills to refill their slip-on tanks with more water from tiny stock dams. That is a huge waste of time and it allowed the fire to spread.

The process of getting a simple request to the LDCC to arrange more water tankers from the likes of local council, commercial entities or the army would have been made much easier with more effective communications systems as there is little or no mobile coverage and the existing VHF/UHF radios are of limited value behind the hills. Speaking of mobile coverage, an issue identified at Eungella was shoddy maintenance by the major communication carriers with regard to having their diesel back-up generators in place ahead of time with sufficient fuel to keep critical sites going for many days whilst road access was cut off.

I give credit where credit is due. I commend the Ergon people for putting themselves in harm's way to keep mains power available. As it turned out they wound up trapped with the rest of the local community and forced to shelter in the decades-old community hall made of timber, little more than a football field away from the extremes of a rainforest fire. Perhaps putting so many people in harm's way could have been avoided if the Lizzy Creek Road was properly upgraded after the Eungella Range Road was washed away back in the early 1990s. It has seen further slips in recent weeks causing unwanted road closures. One cannot expect a fire scarred hillside left with little more than guinea grass to secure the slopes when downfalls of hundreds of millimetres turn up.

Speaking of revegetation, I am most disappointed in the efforts by the agencies tasked with reef protection and land management after the fires. As soon as crop dusters finished dropping loads of water on the fires—

(Time expired)