




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 13 February 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Inquiry

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.10 pm): It is disappointing to hear the statistics thrown back at us. We have to get to the root of the issue. These were clearly unprecedented fires, but doing the same things over and over again is a recipe for disaster. I support a parliamentary inquiry into Queensland bushfire preparedness on behalf of those who have been excluded from the process and those who have lost so much.

I hope those opposite will not oppose a heartfelt call for bipartisan support to make our state as prepared as possible. It is good public policy that we review these devastating fires to ensure the effectiveness of our future practices. This parliament needs to investigate why these fires occurred in the first place and to the extreme levels experienced. The extremely dry, hot and windy weather was, we agree, a major contributing factor, but despite the government's dismissive narrative and media claims to the contrary, we have experienced heat waves before and will do so again so let us get on and change those outdated practices. Unfortunately we knew these fires were possible when earlier in the year there were 3,000 vegetation fires. A million hectares of land was burnt. For those opposite still sitting back wondering what this is about and for the inner city and Brisbane elite let me use an analogy that I read over Christmas: it is the equivalent of two million Suncorp Stadiums that has been burnt. In spite of that fact, we get dismissed and we are not going to get support tonight.

There is no way that anybody looking at the current state of the burnt out national park areas can say that there is responsible management of these areas at present. Some of these fires burnt so intensely that it destroyed 1,000 years of biodiversity in the Eungella ranges—it is gone. The large, black, hot plume of smoke has killed everything. I feel that my community and those affected have earned the right to comment to a parliamentary inquiry.

We must acknowledge that a great majority of the serious fires started or were allowed to develop in national parks or other government controlled protected areas where fire hazard reduction burns are not done appropriately. The state government is a landowner like everyone else, with perhaps more obligation to the residents who sit beside them, and it must protect these estates. The fires in the Deepwater and Eurimbula national parks are examples of the poor management of these areas over many years. For years these areas have not had controlled burns. It used to be open grassland, not thick, overgrown scrub as it is now. Over the years since these areas came under government control they have become hugely overgrown with lantana and giant rat's tail grass. We have a failed policy agenda when eight million hectares of national park is added to our protected estates without bushfire prevention and preparedness activities to reduce vegetation fuel loads.

Who can forget Labor removing the opportunity for managed grazing in selected national parks in times of drought to manage grassland, or the ongoing savage removal of stock grazing permits. No wonder we have a problem. At a time when the damage caused by these fires is still very much in the minds of all involved, it is time that we give consideration to what we can do in relation to prevention in the future.

There are many critics of the government and its handling of vegetation, fire and national park management in Queensland. What we get from this arrogant government is an internal review that will not achieve anything. The savagery of the Labor government's legislation agenda fails in many areas. We must deal with feral animals and adhere to the good neighbour policy. This has all come about as a result of Premier Beattie's deals with Brisbane Greens to convert managed lease country into national parks.

I have read many stories of devastation. There is one account I would like to bring to the attention of the House. This person had a lease that was one of 72 leases across the state that was impacted—a total of one million acres. There were 72 rural families locked out of land they had managed for generations on the ideologically driven notion that by removing humans from the environment it will return it to a Garden of Eden. What a mistake that was. The reality is infestation of lantana and feral pigs.

Labor has invested nothing in resourcing the protection of our protected estates and given nothing to those neighbours who have been dealt a cruel blow. One family has described a fire that burnt and destroyed an entire 4,000 acres of their lease along with the majority of the Bulburin National Park. They commented—

Some would blame climate change. I blame incompetence. If we had been allowed to safely back-burn as we did with our freehold country there would have been no need for the carnage.

We have a chance tonight in the House to do the right thing and review the policies of successive governments, to show leadership, maturity and better protect those who have given us their trust to better manage Queensland.