



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

---

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2019

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Spiteri, Mr G; QFES**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (2.14 pm): During the devastating bushfires that tore through Deepwater and Baffle Creek in my electorate in November last year, I watched the strength and spirit of my local community as neighbours were supported and cared for and volunteers fought alongside QFES to save lives and property. One of those generous people, George Spiteri, was contracted by QFES to use his bulldozer to clear firebreaks to support those who were fighting an unpredictable and very hot wildfire. Without hesitation, George took his own equipment into the fire zone trusting that, if anything went wrong, QFES had his back.

Sadly for George, the sudden firestorm engulfed his bulldozer and he was lucky to escape with his life. As a result, George lost machinery worth hundreds of thousands of dollars and all of his contracts for work this year have been left wanting. He was left without any financial support. George also lost his home, much of his farm equipment and years of stored prized honey.

George assumed that QFES would cover his losses with an insurance policy. That would seem to be a reasonable expectation. When George was asked to help the firefighters, he did not think twice and was out in the field as fast as he could. I am sad to report that, for George, that is not the case. It is now nine months since George Spiteri put in his claim for the replacement of his bulldozer and compensation for the loss of income as a result.

There has been nine months of disappointment and frustration as QFES haggles backwards and forwards with a man who, as a sole trader, is dependent on a quick assessment and compensation to see him back on his feet and back to work. There has been nine months of phone calls, assessor visits, more phone calls and still George is waiting for his payment. George's bulldozer was worth \$250,000. Since the fire George has lost tens of thousands of dollars in lost business opportunities and still QFES muddles around.

What does that do to a local community's willingness to help during the next fire? Will other machinery operators, who are watching George Spiteri's experience with QFES, take their dozers and tractors into the next fire zone with the risk of being put through the same experience with QFES? I think not. We need our local volunteers and businesses to respond quickly to an emergency, and they do. We need to assure our local volunteers that they will have some support in a wildfire. For the sake and good name of our terrific Fire and Emergency Services, we need George Spiteri's problem fixed. It has blown out of all proportion. It needs to be fixed and it needs to be fixed fast.

I also want to highlight the terrific team at the Captain Creek Rural Fire Brigade. This brigade has a large and dedicated membership and it provided exemplary service during the fires in 2018 and since. Unfortunately, this brigade has been subjected to many stressful allegations and investigations. After nine months, the members of this brigade are frustrated and angry with the lack information from QFES.

The volunteer members deserve to be able to elect their representatives. The longer QFES management continues to interfere with this brigade's business and disempower its members, this brigade's future is in question. Captain Creek deserves better.

That is just an example where I have tried many times to deal with QFES to resolve lingering issues in my electorate after the wildfires—and no-one admits that they were 'somewhat unique'. There are processes in place to look after volunteers in my community. I am asking for some intervention to make sure that my community gets what it expects and deserves.