




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2019

MOTION

Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness, Parliamentary Inquiry

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.11 pm): In rising to speak in support of the motion, never before has Labor's warped and irresponsible ideology been demonstrated so publicly than when one reviews their dangerous policies and public statements on bushfires. There are those who are blaming a lack of action on climate change for the escalation in life-threatening bushfires. This issue has become the ultimate play of hysteria and political hypocrisy from those opposite. The real reason bushfires are burning out of control in Queensland right now is the crazy, zealotry way the left wing of the Labor party now controls the state in relation to these issues.

Last year the Burnett region saw some of the most terrifying bushfires Queensland has ever experienced and this year we are bracing for more. Already our crews have been put to the test this season and sadly it is only just beginning. Currently our crews in the Bundaberg and Burnett region are run off their feet. There are fires still burning all over the Burnett region: near Woodgate, Apple Tree Creek, Biggenden, Lowmead and near Colosseum. How long can we ask these people to keep up with this? When Labor stopped effective vegetation management, removed stock grazing permits, made it impossible to do any mitigation—many times on people's own country—natural disasters through man-made nonsense are now commonplace. Over the last two disastrous fire seasons our volunteers, who risk so much, are sick of putting their lives at risk while functioning under a system that is now effectively working against them.

Those opposite, who gleefully repealed sensible vegetation laws under instruction from those of the left of Labor, were warned. Farmers warned them that back-burning bans would cause fires, yet they all ignored the pleas of landowners, many who marched on our parliament—I remember—to tell the government what it should have done. Our state deserves a mature review into the devastation that continues to plague many parts of Queensland. Our state deserves the parliament to seriously review the effectiveness of the government's bushfire prevention and preparedness activities leading up to the 2019 Queensland fires. Most recall just how underprepared we were in 2018. We knew, farmers knew and regional communities knew that decades of neglect were going to transfer into major fire disasters. That is why this inquiry reviews fire reduction practices conducted and coordinated by QFES, including its responsibility to issue notices to landowners to reduce fuel loads, including on state controlled land and in national parks.

When the government tries to deflect and sanitise the IGEM 2018 bushfire review report findings to deflect that overall bushfire prevention activities undertaken by QFES had declined by 83 per cent, completed hazard reduction burns had declined by 75 per cent, completed firebreaks had declined by 82 per cent and community education activities had also declined we know we have a serious problem—a problem that sadly happens under incompetent Labor governments. The Labor government has failed to implement a single recommendation from the Queensland Auditor-General's 2015 bushfire prevention and preparedness report.

The question from Queenslanders is why are vital bushfire prevention measures not happening under Labor? Over the last few weeks I cannot tell the House how many calls we on this side have had to our offices. Many fires have started in national parks and on state controlled land. We owe it to our hardworking rural fire volunteers and the thousands of Queenslanders who have been affected by these devastating fires to get answers through a full inquiry. Can members believe that 136 children have been charged with endangering property in Queensland by lighting fires? Eighteen have been convicted.

Over the past five years Labor has failed to act on improving our preparedness and prevention activities which will save lives, communities and also save native vegetation and protect wildlife and livestock which is crucial to our economy. Queenslanders deserve to know from their government if it has conducted due diligence or whether it is bowing to environmentalist pressures not to back-burn. I share the concerns many Queenslanders hold about land management practices to control fuel loads and how our national parks are managed. Landholders want to protect their property and livestock. They need the support of QFES. Queenslanders are scared about what this season will bring. They are angry that nothing has been done since the horror we saw last year. In 2018 over one million hectares around the state, including a huge area of my electorate, was burnt out because of the mismanagement of state controlled land assets. It was absolutely devastating but was something we could have learnt from. Today there are 8.2 million hectares of national park in Queensland, with large areas currently being incinerated by fires that could have been avoided.

The Labor government has restricted access to millions of hectares of densely thickened eucalypt forests that have not been back-burned this millennium and that have no firebreaks. There is sadly no doubt that the Labor government has allowed our state and our people to become susceptible to bushfires through its mismanagement. There is no question that the intense wind and heat we are experiencing has escalated the fires, but they are not the reason or the cause. The real reason is mismanagement under this government and its constant need to lock up more and more national parks and native forests. A high-risk bushfire area does not simply grow overnight. Labor kicked all the graziers out of the state forests so now they are overgrown and thick with combustible fuel. Labor has failed to conduct vital cool burns and as a result put our communities at risk. We can take actions now that could prevent these devastating bushfires in the future. It is time we talked about these issues, had a full inquiry, and got on with the job of protecting Queensland.