




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 4 February 2020

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Bushfires, Land Management

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.45 pm): I rise to put on the record the LNP's sympathy for the victims of the current bushfires in Queensland and across Australia. Since the current fire season started in Queensland last September, the courage and kindness displayed by ordinary Australians responding to an extraordinary public disaster has been inspiring. Lives have been lost, houses and property have been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of hectares have been reduced to ashes. It is a public tragedy. For the victims it is also a deeply personal tragedy and one that is ongoing.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the severe and prolonged drought has contributed to the size and speed of these fires. As the LNP has been saying since last year, poor land management regimes over many years have also been a major contributing factor. Australia's ecology is a fire based ecology. This means it requires constant management. Otherwise, make no mistake, we are living with a time bomb that is bound to go off. Queensland has always had climate cycles of wet years, when vegetation grows like crazy, followed by dry years, when the vegetation transforms into fire fuel. Climate change will only make these cycles more extreme.

In Queensland we no longer seem to have any system in place to monitor fuel loads or manage cool burning locally. Under Labor there has been far too much centralisation and very little transparency. Once upon a time, most of this was locally coordinated, bringing together local fire wardens, the local council, departmental representatives and Queensland Rail, Main Roads and even national parks and forestry. If we accept that our cool burn season is going to be shorter, then we need to reinstate these tried and true approaches, and we need state government departments to do their duty.

Last Friday the *Australian* reported that Queensland's department of forestry simply does not concern itself with bushfire in nearly four million hectares of state forest it is in charge of managing. I table this article for the House.

Tabled paper. Article from the *Australian*, dated 31 January 2020, titled 'Forestry staff not trained to face bushfire crisis: expert' [163](#).

These forests represent a major public asset which earned \$17 million in royalties last financial year. That is nothing compared to the threat these unmanaged areas of land represent to neighbouring landholders.

Questions have also been left unanswered concerning fuel management in Queensland's national parks. Western Australia's south-western corner has experienced a 30-year decline in rainfall. This beautiful part of the world is a biodiversity hot spot of global significance and is home to world famous forests. The Western Australian government now sets KPIs for fuel management in three key forests in terms of the age of the fuel on the forest floor. They aim to ensure no fuel is older than six years.

By contrast, Queensland is leaving years of cyclone and flood debris to decay on the ground in our regions. We are seeing the results in spots like Eungella and Deepwater National Park. We have also been allowing eucalyptus to encroach into rainforest and calling that eco-friendly. Indigenous people always burned the fringes of the rainforest to prevent this, because eucalyptus is explosive. Now we pretend it is climate change that is bringing fire to the rainforest when it is our own poor land management. In contrast, the Northern Territory has instituted Indigenous burning regimes across the entire cycle of the year. It has revolutionised the management of fire risk in areas such as Kakadu National Park. Queensland needs to adopt this regime in the savannah lands.

We have been told continuously since the 2018 fires that landholders are free to conduct their own bushfire fuel hazard burns. The minister says that the laws have not changed in 20 years. This is simply not true. If members want proof of the impact on bushfire risk management, they need look no further than the recent decision of the Queensland Court of Appeal.

The Court of Appeal upheld a \$1 million order on penalties and costs against a Queensland grazier for illegally clearing native vegetation while constructing firebreaks. Lawyer Dan Creevey said that the decision is a stark warning to all landholders that vegetation management laws do apply and that the penalties are severe. The results of these policies are there to see. If we are to do better, kindness and courage are not enough. We also need honesty and intelligence as well. We have to ensure that we have the right procedures in place to ensure that landholders have the ability to protect their land. We also have to ensure that state government departments right across the Queensland government do their job to reduce fuel loads in state forests and national parks. When fires in Queensland do start and they hit the national parks, basically the fire explodes and gets worse and worse and it is then volunteers, rural firefighters and firefighters right across this state who have to defend. There is a saying in Queensland at the moment—

(Time expired)