




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 6 February 2020

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (3.49 pm): I move—

That the House take note of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee report No. 49, 56th Parliament, titled *Examination of Queensland Audit Office report 5: 2018-19: Follow-up of bushfire prevention and preparedness*, tabled on 20 September 2019.

In speaking about a report on bushfires, I thought it would be important to note what recently happened in the summer of 2019-20. There were 33 people killed, including nine firefighters. There was an estimated 11 million hectares burnt and the destruction of over 3,000 homes. It is estimated that one billion wildlife have been killed. Thousands of people were forced to leave their homes and 3,000 Army Reservists were called out to assist. The environmental impacts of these bushfires include an estimated 350 million tonnes of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere; reduced air quality due to excess smoke for cities including Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra for various durations over the summer; and plumes of smoke have travelled up to 7,000 miles around the world, impacting New Zealand and South America.

In relation to the audit report, one of the things that has become obvious is that a lot has moved on since that report. Essentially there has been great progress made in relation to how the Queensland fire service deals with alerting people to impending danger, and I think a lot of that was played out in Peregian. Whilst this report perhaps can be seen to be somewhat dated, what is important is that this has always been a moving feast, for want of a better analogy. For example, with regard to losses in Victoria in the Black Saturday bushfires—which were recorded as being the most devastating before the most recent events—173 people lost their lives during those bushfires. The human toll from bushfires in Australia has somewhat compounded each year since this first report was implemented.

There is no doubt that managing bushfires is a vital part of protecting our communities and maintaining our environmental habitats. Local governments in Queensland are primarily responsible for managing disaster events at the community level, and this responsibility comes from the Disaster Management Act itself. The Queensland Fire and Emergency Services is the primary provider of fire and emergency services in Queensland as set out in the Fire and Emergency Services Act. In 2017 one disturbing factor reported by the Queensland police and Fire and Emergency Services was that up to 50 per cent of bushfires in Australia are deliberately lit or started under suspicious circumstances. The Climate Institute reported that the total insured loss from bushfires in 2012-13 was \$5.6 billion.

The Queensland Audit Office examined whether Queensland Fire and Emergency Services has effectively implemented the recommendations that were made back then. The *Follow-up of bushfire prevention and preparedness* report includes a detailed review and analysis of work undertaken by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services against the original audit recommendations. This examination assessed the actions taken by QFES since the original report addressed the underlying issues that led to the recommendations.