




Speech By
Hon. Meaghan Scanlon

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

Record of Proceedings, 27 May 2021

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

K'gari, Bushfires

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs) (10.04 am): K'gari is a special place to many Queenslanders. It has been the home of the Butchulla people, the traditional owners of the land, for thousands of years. It has become a treasured holiday destination for families who visit to explore the world's largest sand island. That popularity has in turn supported dozens of tourism operators and mum-and-dad businesses that in turn have created jobs for Queenslanders. Therefore, when a fire was illegally lit on the island last year, one can imagine the impact that had on all of Queensland.

We saw a multiagency approach to tackling the bushfire which, fortunately, saw no lives lost and no reports of damage to infrastructure. I especially acknowledge the response of our rangers who faced extreme conditions and worked around the clock to respond to that bushfire. The fire covered nearly 85,000 hectares, which is just over half the island. Thirty water-bombing aircraft dropped more than 13 million litres of water on the fire.

Today we table the Inspector General Emergency Management's review report and the government's response to the K'gari bushfire. The wideranging review consulted with traditional owners, residents, businesses and various agencies. Our response confirms that all 38 of the report's recommendations will be supported or supported in principle. My department will lead the implementation of the recommendations tasked to it and will work with other agencies to implement those where the QPWS has a supporting role. In fact, rangers are already undertaking some of the very important work highlighted in the report. As part of our \$16 million enhanced fire management program, rangers are delivering important outcomes on K'gari in line with recommendations.

To further help implement recommendations, the Palaszczuk government will also provide an additional \$5 million over four years and \$1 million ongoing. That commitment is on top of our annual \$10 million investment for the management of the island with traditional owners. It will boost our rangers' dedicated fire response and management capacity on K'gari and support additional work on fire trails on the island. The Department of Environment and Science has also committed a further \$1.26 million to review K'gari's fire management strategy and acquire plant equipment to improve fire preparation and response capability.

As we implement those reforms it is promising to see K'gari's regrowth. We are seeing new plants emerge from the ashes as bushfire affected areas recover. To date, DES has spent over \$443,000 on post fire recovery works, including carrying out a post bushfire ecological values assessment with Butchulla representatives. We are now getting on with a \$4.8 million investment to look at new tourism opportunities, together with the Butchulla people. Queenslanders are returning to the island in their droves, once again supporting traditional owners, businesses and tourism operators. Camping nights are up more than 38,000 on last financial year, with more than 250,000 nights spent on K'gari in the 2020-21 financial year, proving that K'gari is back.

The Palaszczuk government will continue to support the management of K'gari, together with the Butchulla people, and the jobs and businesses that rely on it. We will advocate for more funding from the federal government for this World Heritage listed area and we will make sure that K'gari remains a special place to Queenslanders.