




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2023

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Capricornia Correctional Centre, Grass Fire

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.06 pm): On 14 September 2023 a fire destroyed approximately 3,000 acres of land affecting multiple landholders adjacent to the Capricornia Correctional Centre located 20 kilometres north of Rockhampton. Of particular concern is information I have received from multiple services that this fire allegedly started because of grass slashing being conducted on property under the control of the Capricornia Correctional Centre. At the time of the fire I am informed there was a high fire danger warning in place. As many people would be aware, slashing during a high fire danger period should be avoided due to the serious risk of starting a fire. This fire spread quickly and caused catastrophic damage to nearby properties. Vital stockfeed has been destroyed, trees are down and fences are down. It was only through sheer luck that livestock were not lost in substantial numbers. In many cases property owners are now forced to feed livestock and will be doing so until it rains. Otherwise they will have to agist them off property or be forced to sell them at a potential loss.

One would think the Palaszczuk Labor government would do whatever it could to support property owners who suffered severe damage caused by a fire which started on government land. Are the Premier and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services aware of this issue? As at today, QCS have refused to accept liability. I am led to believe there may be some government assessors floating around. In fact, they may be there today. What is this government actually doing to address the needs of the property owners right now in their time of need? The government should be doing whatever it can do to support property owners affected by this fire, and they should be coordinating the response to this event.

Furthermore, it was reported that there were no evacuations from the correctional centre. However, I am now told that there may have been evacuations. Why don't we know? This Labor government is more concerned about trying to manage negative media than being up-front and honest with the people of Queensland. It has been nearly a month since the fire and it would be reasonable to expect the exact cause would have been established by investigators. Minister Ryan has some serious questions to answer. Will the minister commit to publicly releasing the cause of the fire? Will the minister commit to having the commissioner of corrections contact affected landholders and maybe—just maybe—offer an apology and an assurance they will get the financial and physical assistance they need to get their properties and their livelihood back on track? Will the minister assure systems are in place to prevent this from happening again? Affected landowners need government assistance now—not just when the government is ready—and they need answers today.