

Question on Notice No. 850, Thursday, 19 August 2004

Mr LIVINGSTONE asked the Minister for Emergency Services (Mr Cummins) - With reference to recent fires in the Ipswich area and the early start to the fire season-

Will he outline how the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is ensuring communities are prepared for this year's fire season?

Mr CUMMINS:

I thank the Member for his Question and would like to congratulate him on his ongoing strong support for Emergency Services within his electorate.

The long term strategy of this Government of ensuring that design of roads and vegetation separations in subdivisions, plus the design of structures in high hazard areas afford greater protection against bushfire. This has been achieved by the declaration of State Planning Policy, which works within local authority planning schemes. Assessments of fire hazard have been made available from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) to all local authorities.

The management of fire on existing rural and residential lots remains clearly the responsibility of the landholder - for forest reserves and national parks, responsibility rests with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service; while local authorities manage such areas as water supply catchments. These organisations have been busy during the winter months conducting hazard reduction burns. The QFRS, including the volunteer Rural Fire Brigades at Lowood, Minden, Prensaw, Fernvale, Pine Mountain, Marburg, Grandchester and Mt Forbes have been conducting coordinated hazard reductions and joint exercises to ensure that the inevitable response to summer fires will be maximised.

All residents and property owners should be alert and aware of the high fire danger risk that exists across the State and ring 000 immediately they are aware of any fire.

With latest bushfire risk mapping showing the majority of the state under a high fire danger, our firefighters are calling on all Queenslanders to be vigilant. If anyone sees someone acting suspiciously in the vicinity of a fire they need to report it.

A large number of bushfires are deliberately lit and we all have a part to play in bringing firebugs to task. This Government will have no hesitation in throwing the book at anyone caught lighting fires.

Over many years my department has directed information and education materials to communities and individuals outlining the fire risk and ways of minimising that risk. Whilst there has been a positive response in some areas, many individuals are indifferent to their risk from bushfire events.

As a consequence, the risk to firefighters and the residents themselves is increased considerably. The lack of bushfire preparedness is the single greatest contributor to the resident's exposure to potential loss or damage.

If residents have not already done so, now is the time to prepare for the upcoming grass and bushfire season.

In particular, Queenslanders who live in regions where urban and rural areas meet - which has been dubbed the iZone by firefighters - really need to ensure they are ready. The fire service is building on its existing assistance to these communities with a major community education initiative to increase the bushfire preparedness of people living in these areas. Including the employment of five additional iZone trainers to target specific training for permanent staff and volunteers working in the urban/rural interface which was announced in the budget.